

DEATH TO THE TRAITOR;

OR,

CLAUDE DUVAL

AND THE POACHERS,

CONTAINING THE REMARKABLE

ADVENTURES IN THE SECRET CAVE,

AND THE

CONSPIRACY OF THE POISONED WINE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CLAUDE DUVAL," "BLACK BESS," "GENTLEMAN JACK," &c.

With Illustrations.

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DEATH TO THE TRAITOR!

OR,

CLAUDE DUVAL AND THE POACHERS,

CHAPTER I.

A NARROW ESCAPE AND A RACE.

It is notorious that CLAUDE DUVAL, generally known as "Gentleman Jack," was a great admirer of the fair sex, but unfortunately for himself, and also for many of the objects of his admiration, he did not always confine his gallantries to legitimate subjects. From this remark the reader will infer that, provided the lady suited his taste, he was apt to lay seige to her affections, without troubling himself to inquire whether she were maid, wife or widow; and if the truth must be told, it would appear that he had rather a preference for other men's goods, both animate and inanimate.

At the time of which we write, it was the custom of most men, with any pretensions to gentility, to gird a sword on their thigh, and thus they were prepared to resent any undue familiarity with their property, which being the case, it is not to be supposed that the "Gallant Claude" indulged his propensity without occasionally incurring considerable danger. But this had little effect upon him, and provided the lady was fair and kind, husbands, lovers and brothers were equally set at defiance.

Although Claude was even ready to defend his own conduct at the rapier's point, and also to protect the objects of his love, it sometimes happened that advantage was taken by jealous husbands of his absence to inflict vengeance upon their faithless spouses, a most lamentable instance of which was related in the previous volume, which the reader will remember resulted in the murder of Maria Finch and the accidental death of her jealous husband.

It is known to the reader of that volume that Duval had no direct agency in this double death, but inasmuch as he was concealed in the lady's chamber, on the night of the murder, and he who did the deed was by his own death incapable of giving evidence, it became highly necessary that Claude should make an early escape from the house.

This he succeeded in doing, and had ridden many miles from the scene of the disaster, when he became aware that he was followed by one of the Bow street officers, who seemed for ever on his trail. But our hero was too shrewd for this blunderer, and after escaping two pistol shots, he managed to disable the man near Golden Green, and meeting with a party of horsemen, he boldly announced himself as an officer, and requested them to convey the wounded and insensible runner, (whom he represented to be the notorious highwayman, Claude Duval) to some place of security, which, hoping for the reward, they readily promised to do.

Duval having thus got rid of both horsemen and officer, made his way to a little cottage in Kentish Town, where he had placed a young girl the object of his present regards, named Adele, with whom he passed a few hours in pleasant and affectionate converse—for he really loved her—almost as much as he did his wife, the beautiful May, and having changed his apparel, he put his faithful steed in charge of the village innkeeper, and taking a stage that passed through the place, he rode straight to the city, anxious to learn all the particulars of what took place upon the discovery of the death of the Finches, and how the matter was regarded in the vicinity of its occurrence. The coach having reached London, Claude hastily alighted and proceeded to satisfy his curiosity.

Duval was not kept long in suspense regarding the light in which the murderer of Mrs. Finch was viewed, for upon a lamp-post he saw a placard which stated that, "Whereas, a dreadful murder had been committed, by a man unknown, upon Mrs. Maria Finch; and that it was supposed that the murderer, upon being pursued by Mr. Finch along the tops of some houses, had thrown down that gentleman to the pavement below, by which he was killed at once." The placard then went on to state that, "A Reward of One Hundred Pounds would be paid to any one who would give information as to who the party was who called upon Mrs. Finch upon the evening of the murder, and a reward of another hundred pounds upon his being lodged in any of his Majesty's jails."

"Pleasant," said Duval, as he finished reading the placard; and then a rough voice behind him, said—

"By your leave, sir!"

Duval stepped aside, and found that he had been impeding a bill-sticker in his work. This man in a few moments appended a smaller bill to the foot of the other one, which contained a full description of Duval, given by the servant of the house where the Finches had lodged.

"A bad job, sir, that ere murder," said the bill-sticker

"Very."

"They'll nab him, sir, don't you think?"

"It is very likely."

Duval walked slowly away. He had certainly all the information he wanted, and much more than was at all agreeable upon the subject of the murder; and, galling as it was to be supposed the guilty party, he did not see the smallest chance of being able to prove the contrary; for Finch was dead, who might have owned to his share in the dreadful deed.

"Well," said Claude, "all I have to do is to take care of number one. I am willing to admit that my conduct in the transaction was bad enough; but it was not so bad as they would fain make it out. I did not kill either of them, although I may have been the indirect cause of the death of both. I will to the road again, and try to banish these uncomfortable thoughts, or I shall know no peace of my life. This affair will blow over in a little time, and the secret must remain in my own bosom."

There was no conveyance from the City to Kentish Town, where Duval had left his horse, so he resolved to walk the distance; and, by getting across

the fields by Finsbury, and then making his way by Islington, he knew that an hour's sharp walking would take him as nearly as possible to his place of destination.

With this intention, Duval struck off as nearly as he could for Finsbury fields, which at that time, were quite clear and open, as the Kentish Town fields are in our own time, and he thought certainly of nothing less than of meeting with anything in the shape of an interruption by the way. Fate, however, had decreed it otherwise.

He had got clear of the houses pretty well, and was in the neighborhood of some citizens' villas, not far from Finsbury, when he heard a loud voice cry—

"Stop! Stop! Stop!"

This was not a species of invocation which Duval was likely to let go quite unheeded, especially as he was upon foot. Had he been well mounted, probably he would have treated it in a much more supercilious manner. He turned on the instant, and saw a mounted man coming at a smart trot towards him, up a lane in the immediate vicinity.

"Hilloa!" cried the horseman, again. "Stop, my friend."

"What for?" said Duval.

"Only to answer me a question. Have you seen a man on a very dark bay horse in this neighborhood?"

"No."

The mounted man came close up to Duval, and they both looked in each other's faces for a few moments in silence. To the intense astonishment of Duval, this mounted man was no other than the officer with whom he had had the encounter near Golden Green, and whom he had succeeded in playing the trick of giving him into custody; and no sooner had Duval made this discovery, by an attentive perusal of the officer's face, than the officer found out, by the same process, who he was speaking to.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "it is Duval."

"Right," said Duval. "You never spoke a truer word in all your life, my friend."

"You are my prisoner now. Scoundrel, your career is now, at last, at an end."

"My dear sir, you flatter yourself," said Duval.

Quick as thought, then, and before the officer could possibly divine his intention, Duval stooped, and seizing him by the foot, fairly canted him off his horse into the roadway. The officer made two or three plunging attempts to rise, but the large riding boots he wore impeded him, and Duval had time to spring into the vacant saddle.

"Now, my friend," he shouted. "My career is not quite over yet. If you want your horse again, you must look for him some miles from London, and for fear you should be disappointed by taking the wrong direction, I am going north. Good day!"

The officer, without troubling himself by any further efforts to get up in a hurry, pulled a pistol from his breast-pocket, and fired at Duval. The bullet just slightly touched his left arm.

"All right," cried Duval.

No one knew better how, at a moment's notice, to start a horse to a full gallop than Duval, and before the officer could get at another pistol, he was off like the wind.

"Stop him! It's Claude Duval," roared the officer. "Stop him! Help—help! It's Duval, the highwayman! A hundred pounds to anybody who will stop him. Help—murder—help—watch!"

As Duval galloped on the sounds died away, and by the time the old houses of Upper Islington appeared, he was in complete solitude and silence, and the officer's voice had faded away in the dim distance.

"A narrow touch, that," said Duval, as he slackened his speed a little and looked around him.

Not a soul was visible, and from the high ground upon which he was now, if any one had been in his proximity, he must have seen them easily. The horse upon which he rode was a good one, and far from being in the least distressed, seemed very much to have enjoyed the gallop it had had over the fields; and then, Duval was rather a lighter weight than the officer, so that it was something like a relief to the steed to change its rider in such a way.

What was to be done now, might have puzzled some folks, but Duval was a personage of rapid resolves; and after a very few minutes' consideration, he made up his mind to ride to Kentish Town, and then, when he got very near to where his own horse was put up, and which by that time would of course be quite fresh and rested, he would be able to get rid of the one he rode, by dismounting and letting it go loose. He did not think it at all prudent to ride it to the door of the Inn where he had left his own steed, for in Kentish Town he was as yet unknown, and that would have been, in all probability, a means of identifying him, more complete than pleasant to him.

He was not, however forgetful of the probability that he should be followed by some person whom the discomfitted officer might stir up to such an enterprise quickly, and he knew that where he had left that very unlucky individual, a fresh horse could easily be procured; so he paused about every five minutes to take a long look around him.

Upon one of these occasions it was, that he saw three men on horseback coming on as rapid as the nature of the ground over which they proceeded would permit them, in his direction.

"Humph!" said Duval, "people don't cross a ploughed field, if they can help it. They think it a near cut, or they would have found out some better path. No doubt they congratulate themselves now upon the likelihood of coming up with me, and taking me very comfortably, so far as they are concerned, to town. We shall see."

Duval had gone so much to the right, that in the course, even of a very few moments, he arrived at Newington Green; but still, if he could strike across the country he was not so far from Kentish Town as any one would have supposed, and it must be recollect ed, that at that time there was by no means the amount of obstruction in the shape of buildings and inclosures that all that part of the suburbs of London now presents.

Crossing the Green then, he dived down a narrow lane and soon came to a low hedge, beyond which stretched the open fields; and at some distance off, he could plainly see the cottages in Kentish Town, and mark the whole of the straggling road right up to Highgate.

It was now that he put the capabilities of the officer's horse to the proof. He did not think it wise to give the creature a heavy leap to do in the first instance, for well he knew that such a course of proceeding will sometimes shake a horse at the outset of his career, and make him lose speed for a mile or two; so Duval sought for a gap in the hedge, through which he charged him, and then walking him for a few moments on the turf to get him accustomed to the feel of it after the roads, he gradually urged him on, and in the course of three minutes was flying over the meadows at a tremendous rate.

Two magnificent leaps of enclosure were now taken with ease by the horse, and without relaxing in his speed in the least degree; and Duval seemed to be approaching the houses in Kentish Town with magical rapidity.

Our hero now did not pull up to look about him; but when nothing but a level meadow was before him, he at times swayed himself half round in his saddle, and took a keen glance along the fields.

He saw his pursuers about half a mile behind him. They seemed, however,

to feel that their cattle were unequal to the leaps that were necessary in the cross-country ride, and they were making for the high road.

"That will do," said Duval.

He now felt quite certain that he should be able to reach the Inn at Kentish Town, and to get his horse out and be off before they could reach him by the road. His great object was that they should have no knowledge of where he had put up his horse, for of all places in the world he did not wish any inquiry to be made concerning him in Kentish Town, and that was on account of Adele.

On he went at the same slashing rate; and now, before you could well have counted twelve, he was at the back of Kentish Town; but an unlucky obstacle presented itself to him in the shape of the long straggling grounds belonging to a market gardener and florist.

To coast this place would have taken more time than Duval felt at all inclined to waste, so in the first instance he jumped the hedge, and let his horse alight in the middle of a bed of asparagus, and then on he went right through a whole rotation of crops, until he reached the gravel path that led out into the village; but there he met the gardener himself, who, being a very irascible man, at once flung a long rake at his head.

Duval had no wish to ride into the village, and as it was quite immaterial to him whether he dismounted where he was or elsewhere, he flung himself hastily from his horse, and catching up the rake, he felled the gardener with one blow of its handle, breaking it in two by the process.

"I can't stand upon trifles," said Duval, and in another moment he ran out into Kentish Town, and found himself exactly opposite to the Inn where he had left his horse. The officer's steed which had done him such good service, he left in the nursery-garden to amuse himself with such dainties as he might there find suited to his palate.

Without the least appearance then of hot haste, Duval went into the Inn yard, and asked for his horse. He held up half-a-guinea between his finger and thumb to the ostler, as he merely uttered the two words—

"Be quick!"

The sight of the glittering coin was quite a magical stimulus, and the horse was out and saddled in an incredibly short space of time. The half-guinea was transferred from Duval's finger to the hand of the well-pleased ostler, and in another moment Duval was in the high road, and firmly on his saddle.

"Now," he said, as he patted his steed. "Now, those gentlemen behind us if they are inclined for a little excursion of some twenty miles or so into the country, can have it."

He trotted on until he got to the rise of the hill, and then he took a long look behind him. The three horsemen had got quite clear of the village, and were pointing him out to each other.

"Very good," said Duval. "Half a mile is a long pull up; and if you catch me you will have me, my friends, but not before."

The whole of that neighborhood was well known to Duval, and he fancied that Swain's Lane was not quite so bad an ascent as the high road to Highgate, so when he got to that turning he at once took it; and at a long gallop, which his horse in ascending hills had not his equal at, away they went up the lane, and in a very few minutes were in Highgate.

Upon the level through the town then, Duval went leisurely, for he was determined that his horse should have every chance, and although he did not believe that the ascent of Swain's Lane had winded him in the least, he was resolved to give him all the advantage in his power.

Highgate, then, so far as regarded the level upon which the village is actually situated, was cleared at a rapid walk only; but after getting to the

descent on the other side, just past the Wrestler's Inn. Duval gave his horse the rein, and away they went towards Finchley at a tremendous pace.

"Bravely done," cried Duval. "Bravely done, my gallant steed! Why we must already have made the half mile that was between us and our foes a whole one."

He kept his ear on the stretch to catch the sound of the horses' feet of his pursuers, but no such indication of their approach reached him, and he concluded rightly enough, that they were toiling up the steep bit of the hill, and so going leisurely enough.

In a few moments Duval was right down in the valley by Finchley, but he did not pause. He left East Finchley well to his left, and keeping still the high road, he ascended to a rising bit of country again, from which he could at intervals command extensive views for many miles round him on all sides.

CHAPTER II.

THE RACE CONTINUED AND THE STRATAGEM.

THE only thing that Duval felt at all solicitous about was, that he should to a certain extent keep his enemies in view. He did not like the idea of their leaving the high road perhaps, and lulling him into a feeling of false security, and then pouncing upon him at some moment when he did not expect them. Therefore was it that he paused now upon the high ground in the immediate neighborhood of Finchley, to reconnoitre the surrounding country.

He took care to get so far to the roadside that the identity of himself and his horse would be very much lost against the trees and the bushes, if his enemies should happen to be looking for him.

Not for the space of about half a minute had Duval been waiting, when he saw coming from Finchley, a poor-looking boy, rather sadly mounted upon a miserable-looking nag, and as he neared the spot where Duval was he saw that he was one of the postboys belonging to the post-office, who for a few shillings-a-week and a red jacket, risk their necks twenty times a week at the very least.

Duval waved his hand to stop him, and the boy pulled up with an uncomfortable jerk.

"Any of my friends down the road?" cried Duval. "We are after a highwayman, my lad."

"Oh, is you," said the boy; "I'm glad to hear you say that, for I was half afraid you was him, and you'd rob my letter bag."

"Oh, dear no."

"Well, they are all a-coming; they have got a couple of young chaps from the village to come with them. They say they will be sure to have him. I suppose you do not like to try him alone?"

"Certainly not."

"Well I must push on whether I meet him or not. A post-office boy mustn't wait for nothing, no how."

"I suppose not."

"Oh dear me, no. Good day. Kim up, will you."

After a short wrangle with his horse, off went the boy, again, at the same rattling kind of half-trot, half-gallop, which only such horses ever think of perpetrating.

"So," said Duval, "they are getting reinforcements, are they? Well, be

It so. The more the merrier. Now, I dare say I might manage to play them the old fox's trick of doubling upon them; but I am inclined for a gallop, so I will lead them by the nose some twenty miles or so farther yet; and if they are not pretty well knocked up by that time, for the pace it is that will do it, they are better mounted, and better horsemen than I take them to be."

Duval, however, was resolved not to start until he actually saw his enemies, for it was only by keeping them constantly in sight from the high portion of the road that he might encounter, that he could gather any amusement in the chase.

But in a moment or two his attention was directed to the sound of wheels in the direction of which he was galloping, and a man in a cart appeared round a turn of the road.

"Hilloa," said Duval. "If you meet some men on horseback, just say that Duval is only a little way ahead, and they may get pretty close to him at dinner time, as he means to put up at a respectable house on the road."

The man in the cart stared, but Duval did not want to give him the opportunity of making any remark, but dashed on at his old pace. He knew that his message would be delivered, for his pursuers would stop every body they met now for a certainty, to ask news of him, since they must have lost sight of him since he turned into Swain's Lane, and he did not wish that he should go straggling about the country in search of him, and so raise a great alarm on his account.

For the next three miles, Duval did not in the least slacken his pace, and it was a tremendous thing to take a horse for that distance at such a speed. Gradually, however, then, he drew up, and stopped at the door of a road-side Inn.

The landlord came out in a moment, and with a profusion of bows, wanted to know if his honor would bait there.

"No," said Duval, "I only want a pot and a pint of your best old ale, land lord, if you please."

"A pot and a pint, sir?"

"Yes, the pint is for me, and the pot is for my friend."

The landlord stood in the middle of the road, and shading his eyes with his hand, he gazed all round him to see for his friend, but finding no one but Duval, he shook his head, saying—

"I don't see him, sir, if you please."

"Never mind," said Duval, "only be quick with the ale, or else I shall have to ride on to the next house."

This was a threat to the landlord of a road-side inn which was not at all to be despised, and accordingly the pot of ale and the pint were produced in two foaming tankards. Duval drank the pint in a moment himself, and then taking the pot in his right hand, he leant over his horse's neck, and held it to the creature's mouth.

It was gone in two or three seconds, and the horse gave a snort of satisfaction.

"Well, I never!" said the landlord; "that's the finest and maltiest old ale as is, and almost too good for Christians, and the idea of a horse whipping up a whole pot of it is—is—"

"What is it?" said Duval.

"Oh, nothing at all, sir, if you thinks proper, nothing in all the world, sir, in course."

"Very good—there's your money."

Duval threw half-a-crown on the ground, and then with a slight touch to the horse, as a hint that the creature well understood, off they were again like the wind.

"Stop! hat man! Stop that man!" roared a person without his hat, washing ^{at} the public-house.

"What him, sir?" said the landlord.

"Yes; stop him! stop him!"

"Lord bless you, sir, he's a mile off by this time. He's had a pint of the old ale himself, and his horse has had a pot. Do you know him, sir?"

"Do I know him? To be sure I do. He took a hundred pounds from me all in gold, one day, on Finchley Common. Its Claude Duval the highwayman."

"Claude Duval?"

"Yes, I should know him again, if it were a hundred years hence. All I got for my money was a good look at him; I have dreamt of him ever since, and now I shall dream of him still more, for here I have missed him by a hair's breadth only."

"Missed him, sir? Why you don't mean all for to go and say as you'd a interfered with him."

"Wouldn't If I was taken by surprise when he robbed me, and was not very well, but if I only had a chance of meeting him again face to face, I'd soon rid society at large of such a vagabond—that I would. I shall always regret that I did not notice him till he was going away—that I shall."

The landlord put his hand up to his eyes, and took a long look down the road.

"What are you looking at, landlord?" said the bold guest.

"Well, I—no—yes. To be sure."

"What is it, landlord?"

"Why if he isn't a-coming back for his change, as I'm a sinner. Yes he is."

"Murder!—help!—Hide me somewhere, landlord. Put me in the cellar—in a cask—under a bed—anywhere, and don't say I mentioned him. Murder! Murder!"

The bold guest rushed into the Inn in a frantic state, and the landlord laughed so, for Duval was not coming back at all, that he was forced to hold by the horse-trough to keep himself up.

While this farce was going on at the Inn door, Duval had made great progress on his road, and began to get into a very beautiful and finely wooded bit of country. The ale that the horse had taken seemed to stimulate him to every exertion, and if it had been necessary, which under the circumstances it was not, Duval could have made an amazing ride of it.

As it was, he pulled up, and finding that he was quite alone, and that not even a house was near him, he dismounted, and seizing the branch of a tree that grew in a hedge-row close at hand, he clambered up to a considerable height, so that he had quite a bird's-eye view of the surrounding country for many miles in all directions: and such a view anywhere in England is very charming, the country lying before the eye, as it does, like some immense garden in the highest state of successful cultivation.

Upon more than one occasion, Duval has shown that he was rather an enthusiastic lover of nature; and now as he took such a long view from the old tree, of all the rich landscapes spread out like a map before him, he would have been delighted to have been permitted to linger for an hour to gaze at it, had not the urgency of his situation warned him, although he was probably in no immediate jeopardy, he had no time to lose.

Far off, looking like insects, he saw a cluster of horsemen coming on at what, at that distance even, his practiced eye told him was a good pace.

"So," he said, "they think to run me down at last. But they will be mistaken. If I am ever nabbed it will be by treachery, and not by a race across the country. Let them come, I am right glad to see that they place such

value upon my word, as to believe that I am to be sought in the north, only because I said as much."

He came down from the tree, and again mounted his faithful horse, which had as docilely as a dog waited for him at the foot of it, and then he took the road again.

"Let me think," he said. "If I were to pause, it would take them now half an hour to come up to me. That is not time enough for me to dine in; I must have three quarters of an hour at the least; so I must find some means of detaining them upon the road."

What those means were to be, Duval did not know at the moment. All he had made up his mind to was, that he would stop and dine somewhere, notwithstanding the pursuit that was so steadily kept up after him. But he was turning the matter over in his mind, and there was but little doubt that his fertile genius in such matters would hit upon some scheme to accomplish what he desired.

He was not galloping now, so that he had an opportunity of looking about him a little, and in the course of a few moments he was rather startled to see the head of a man, as it appeared, just peering over a hedge at him.

"Hilloo!" cried Duval. "Who are you?"

No answer was returned, and upon riding up to the hedge he found that it was a scare-crow in the field beyond it. A coat, trowsers, and an old hat stuffed out with straw, and supported upon a stout stake, made up the illusion.

Duval could not but laugh at the idea of his saying—"Who are you?" to the scarecrow; but he had not ridden half a dozen paces from it, when the idea struck him that it might be the means of procuring him the delay necessary to stop and refresh both himself and his horse.

Duval was quick in action, and with him the conception of every plan was quickly enough followed by its execution. He glanced round him, until he saw a tall chestnut-tree which would just suit his purpose, and then dismounting, he proceeded to carry it out.

He made his way through the hedge, and got possession of the scarecrow, which he threw over into the road. Following it there, he lifted it up, and by a happy jerk he cast it right into the middle of the chestnut-tree, where it lodged securely enough, presenting as nearly as possible the appearance of some one hiding in the tree.

"I think that will do," he said; "and if it does not, it is not a bad joke, and I will keep a good look-out notwithstanding."

He immediately mounted again, and rode on, when to his good satisfaction he met a groom upon horseback. Duval on the instant rode up to him, and said—

"I have been robbed on this road."

"Robbed, sir?"

"Yes, and by the notorious Claude Duval; I have had my watch, a diamond-ring, and sixty pounds taken from me, only half an hour ago, and I hid in a hedge after he had left me, and saw him turn his horse adrift and climb up a large chestnut-tree and hide in it."

"The deuce he did, sir! Then we will have him—I will go back with you, sir."

"No, I cannot, I am on a very particular business, indeed, which must be transacted quickly—my dinner," added Duval, to himself, "or I would go back with you at once. If you can get any assistance on the road, take him, and as I suppose he will join you. I am Sir Marmaduke Toompkins."

The groom took off his hat.

"Which tree is he in, sir?"

"It's a large one, and on the right-hand side of the road as you go to it

from here, and its near a gate with a lot of brambles stuck in it to shut up the field."

"I know it, sir—I know it. It's just a little way on, sir, a big tree with a large branch coming right over the road?"

"The same."

"Thank you, sir; I know it, sir."

"Very good. I believe there is a large reward offered for the apprehension of this Claude Duval. Of course, in my position of life, the money is of no sort of consequence to me, so you can share it with any persons who may assist you in apprehending him; and when you have him safe, I will take care that justice is done you, and that you are not cheated out of it."

"Oh, sir, you are very good."

"Not at all, my friend, not at all. I am sorry that my pressing engagement, indeed, prevents me from having the pleasure of going back with you."

The groom, who was only out to give the horse an airing, was not at all sorry that the sham Sir Marmaduke could not go back, for he hoped to have most of the reward to himself, by the knowledge that he thought he now possessed of the whereabouts of the notorious Claude Duval.

He rode on until he came to the tree, and one glance was sufficient, by showing him a portion of the scarecrow hidden among the branches, to convince him that the information that had been given to him was correct.

"Oh, its all right," he said. "There he is. Of course he has got firearms, and will have a pop at anybody who pretends to look at him. Dear me, what shall I do? I have heard a good deal about this Claude Duval, and they say he's a most desperate fellow, and no more minds blowing a fellow's brains out than he would of lighting his pipe. I must be very careful, for what's the use of the reward to me if I am a dead man before I get any of it?"

Having arrived at this highly philosophical conclusion, the groom was half afraid to look up into the tree, for fear of encountering the much dreaded glance of the highwayman's eye, and he began to think that after all it would be better to share the danger and the reward with some one else.

In this state of mind he waited quietly enough, keeping only now and then an eye on the tree, for fear the highwayman should suddenly slide down its trunk and escape, and waiting with great impatience for some assistance to arrive.

Of course, in due time, up came the mounted party in pursuit of Duval, and with a groan the groom noticed their numbers. He made up his mind, however, to make the best of a bad job, and to pocket, with perfect security, what he could; so, riding forward, so as to meet the party at some distance before they reached the tree, he said—

"Gentlemen, I can tell you of a good thing, if you will let me have some of the advantage coming from it."

"What is it?" cried one. "Be quick, for we are busy."

"But you can't be after anything that will pay you as this will," said the groom.

"You don't know that, young fellow. We are after Claude Duval the notorious highwayman, and there are sufficient rewards offered for him to make us all, and you too, if you could find him; so if you have anything to say, say it quickly and at once, for you find we are not upon trifling business."

"Claude Duval, did you say?"

"Yes, to be sure. Are you deaf?"

No—no. But—speak low or I don't know what may happen. I beg, gentlemen, that you will speak low."

"What for?"

"Listen to me. There are five of you and one of me. Now if you will promise me upon your words, all of you, a sixth part of what you get by taking Claude Duval, I will put you in the way of getting him without much trouble!"

"Will you?"

"If I don't you have nothing at all to pay me, so you are quite safe enough."

"True—true, we are," said the officer, who was the chief person of the party. Upon my word you shall have the sixth of whatever we get if you do what you say. I make you that promise with all these four persons as witnesses to it."

"You all hear him?" said the groom.

"Yes—yes. Of course we do."

"Then, after robbing Sir Marmaduke Tompkins of sixty pounds, and his watch, and a diamond ring, only half an hour ago, he turned his horse adrift and got up into that chestnut tree, where he is now hiding.

The five pursuers of Duval gave five starts at this most unexpected and extraordinary information.

"In that tree?" cried the officer, who had pursued Duval with such pertinacity; "in that tree?"

"In—that—tree," said the groom, solemnly.

"Come on, then. We will soon see that. Come on."

They all trotted up to the tree, followed by the groom, and then the first thing the officer said was—

"There he is, sure enough."

"And I can see his eyes," said one of the others.

"Look out," cried a third. "I can see the barrel of a pistol. He has got up there to shoot us as we pass."

There was a general scattering of the party now all over the road, each one being anxious that if any one were shot it should not be him; and the groom held his hat to the side of his head, and cried—

"Oh, Don't—don't. Murder!"

This panic, however, when it was found that no pistol was fired from the tree, gradually subsided, and the officer gathering courage, cried out in a loud voice—

"Claude Duval—the game is up now. You are wanted, and you cannot escape. We see you, and that is sufficient. You had better come down from that tree a live man, for if you don't you may be quite sure that you will have to come down a dead one, or so badly wounded that you will wish yourself dead."

"Lord bless us!" said the groom, what does he say?"

"Nothing at all."

"Ah!" said one of the men, "he is all the more dangerous on that account, I know."

"He is only planning and plotting something," said one of the young men from Highgate, "and I'll go home."

"And so will I," said the other hero from the same place.

"What?" cried the officer. Go home now, will you, my lads, while we are on the point of catching our man! You must be mad. My idea is that he has hurt himself in some way, and has crawled up the tree to hide."

"But why don't he speak?"

"Oh, he is too much chagrined to do that."

Upon this the two young men who would have taken flight home, again plucked up a little courage, and remained; and the officer again spoke in a loud tone of voice to the scarecrow—

"Claude Duval, do not be foolish. You had much better give yourself up

to us quietly. Who knows but there may be some flaw in the indictment against you even at the Old Baily, and then you may get off this time; but if I am compelled to shoot you, you have no chance."

"What does he say?" cried the other.

"Oh, he's as obstinate as the very deuce. He won't speak."

CHAPTER III.

DUVAL OUTWITS HIS PURSUERS, AND DINES AT HIS LEISURE.

WHEN they found that they could not get a word from the figure in the tree, they grew more and more cautious, for to their imaginations there was something extremely exciting in the fact of the great highwayman being in a tree, and keeping that contemptuous silence.

"I really," said one, "would not fire into the tree. Who knows but it may explode some mine and blow us all up."

"Eh?" cried the officer as he started back. "What do you say?"

The man repeated his view of the case.

"Oh, stuff!" said the officer, "I can't think that at all possible. How can he blow us up?"

"I don't know. He's an outrageous kind of chap, and has as many doubles and twists as an old fox that has lost his tail."

The others laughed at this illustration, and that set the officer's mettle up a little.

"Nonsense, he said; "no doubt he thinks by preserving this silence and mystery, that he will frighten me, as he has already frightened you; but I am not exactly that sort of man; so if he don't come down and give himself up, I shall fire at him. I feel that it is my duty so to do."

Upon this the officer came under the tree again and in a solemn voice he said—

"Claude Duval, you may fancy this is a very fine joke, but I can assure you that it is not; I am determined that I will take you; I have made up my mind to it, I tell you, and set my life upon it. Eh? Did you speak?"

"He didn't say nothing," said one of the others.

"But he moved," said one.

"Did he move?" said the officer, turning round sharply to the man who had spoken last. "Are you quite sure you saw him move, my man?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

At this moment a very large chestnut, that had remained an unwonted time upon the tree, suddenly fell right on the crown of the officer's hat, and as it came from rather a considerable height, it gave his hat a smart rap, and splitting open rattled four chestnuts about his ears.

For the moment this event took him so much by surprise, that he sat upon his horse perfectly motionless, but looking as white as a ghost. Then he cried—

"Murder, what was that? Stop him! Murder!"

A roar of laughter from the men, who had seen exactly what it was, at once awakened him to the fact, that at all events there could be no danger where there was so much hilarity.

"It was only a chestnut, sir, as fell on your head," said one.

"A chestnut?"

"Yes, that was all. He is pelting you with chestnuts, that's all, sir. It's just his way to be always up to some joke or another."

"Joke, does he call it—eh? By the Holy—I'll joke him."

Full of anger, the officer at once now presented his pistol at the scarecrow in the tree, and pulled the trigger.

Bang! went the well-loaded weapon, and a shower of leaves and two more chestnuts came down upon the officer. But to the great surprise of the whole party there was the figure in the tree, sitting on the branch to all appearance as calm and as composed as though nothing at all out of the common way was taking place.

"Confound him," said the officer. "I must have hit him."

"He don't move, sir."

"But I could not miss him, Claude Duval, you are wounded. Are you intent upon self-destruction that you remain in that tree so perversely? Come down, and no further harm will be done to you; but if you remain there you will be destroyed, and your dead body will hang as a scarecrow amid those branches."

The figure maintained its position.

"Did he move?" said the officer.

"I think I saw him move a little," said one.

"I saw him wink his left eye," said another.

"His eye? Can you see his eye?"

"Yes. If you come here, sir, and look right along where I'm pointing to, you'll see his eye just above a little branch of the tree that bends round in this way, just as I'm a-bending my finger. Do you see it, sir?"

"I—think—I—"

"Don't you see it glistening?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to swear to it, but I do think that I really, now you mention it, see a something like a human eye. Yes, surely—upon my word, though it is difficult to say. One is rather apt to imagine the eye, but I feel quite sure I can see his nose and a part of his chin."

"That's very near it, sir."

"Yes, we may safely conclude, under such circumstances, I think, that the eye is there likewise."

"Quite safe, sir."

"Well, my friends, you know that this affair has already cost me a good deal of money, and that when I have paid each of you what I have promised you, and that groom what I have promised him, I shall not be very much the gainer by apprehending Claude Duval; but if any one of you will climb up the tree and fairly make him come down, I'll stand a five pound note down on the spot."

The men looked at each other rather dubiously.

"Recollect," added the officer as he took out his pocket-book, and produced a five pound note from its capacious enclosure, "recollect that five pounds are not easily earned every day in the week by climbing a tree."

"It's an awkward job, sir," said one.

"Oh, very," said another.

"Five pounds, asked the officer, holding the note at arm's length. "Five pounds."

"Hang it all," said one. "I'll do it."

"Will you, my friend? Then the five pounds are yours, and what is more, I will remain with a loaded pistol pointed at the tree, so that if needs be I can render you effectual assistance. My opinion is that when he sees we will have him down, he will give in with a good grace at last."

"I'll try it, sir. I should think he'd have shot some of us already if he had had any pistols, don't you think so?"

"Of course he would. It is as clear as possible. There is no danger whatever in going into the tree! I would do so myself, only I think 'en

be of more use here where I am. Take the note, my friend, and I hope it may do you a deal of good."

"Thank you, sir," said the man, cramming the note into his pocket.
"Thank you, sir, I hopes as it may. Bill, will you give me a leg-up to that first branch?"

"All right," said Bill. "I'll do it."

"Very good."

The man slipped off his coat, and Bill gave him the leg-up to a low branch of the tree, which, when he once got a fair hold of, rendered the rest of his progress easy enough. The others all watched his proceedings with intense eagerness, and the officer, with one eye shut, and a pistol pointed towards the seeming figure in the tree, kept on the watch.

The adventurous man went cautiously from branch to branch until he came near the scarecrow, and then the interest of those below became painfully intense. They saw him kick it with his foot, and then they heard him shout out—

"Oh, my eye!"

"Is he dead?" said the officer.

"As mutton!" said the man.

"Then, my friends, that first pistol shot of mine must have done the business. Is he shot right through the head? I aimed at his head!"

"Everywhere," said the man from the tree. "Catch him, some of you, I'm going to throw him down."

At this intimation, far from coming forward to catch the supposed dead body, they all retreated, officer included, some paces further off than they were, and then they saw their comrade lay hands on the dead body. They saw it fall from branch to branch, and at length down it came to the ground, and lay huddled up at the foot of the tree.

"How light the poor fellow fell," said one.

"Very," said another.

"I take you all to witness now," cried the officer "that before I shot Claude Duval I said all I could to him to get him to come down from the tree and give himself up quietly, but he was so obstinate that he would not. You will all, I am quite sure, be able to depose to that much, my friends."

"Oh, yes—yes."

"Very good. Then now we will get a hurdle, and placing the body upon it, we will take it to the watch-house at Hampstead. Come on, my friends. He is quite dead."

Curiosity, joined to a thorough conviction that Duval was quite dead, induced them all now to come forward, and at the same moment he who had ascended the tree came to the lowest branch and dropped to the ground, after hanging by his hands a moment.

"We are all done," he said, "except me."

"What do you mean?"

"Why you may have Claude Duval among you."

So saying, he picked up the scarecrow which was as light as possible, and flung it right among the advancing group..

The scene that ensued beggars all description.

Some fell flat down upon the road, and bellowed as though they were at the last gasp, others fought madly with their comrades to get away, fancying that they were obstructing them in some way, and one and all raised such a chorus of shouts and yells that the one who had produced all the confusion, by, in a moment of thoughtlessness, throwing the scarecrow among them, thought his safest plan would be to take flight with what he had got, so off he went with his five pound note in his pocket, and catching his horse and his coat he quickly disappeared from the scene.

The unfortunate officer was knocked down and trodden over by the whole party, and as the scarecrow-likewise had come right against him, he was more bruised and bewildered than any of them. It was not until one suddenly cried out—"Why, it's Farmer Stubbins' scarecrow!" that anything like order was restored, and then as they regarded the cause of their terror with careful looks, and glared at each other like men in a dream, the conviction certainly crept over them that done they were to all intents and purposes.

The officer sat on the ground looking half stunned, and there we shall leave him and his companions while we follow the fortune of Duval, who had been so successful in playing off such a *ruse* upon the enemy.

A quarter of an hour more saw him quietly trotting down the hill of Hampstead.

"I wonder," he said, "how long they will continue staring at the scarecrow in the tree? But it don't matter. The north road, for about a week, now will be too hot to hold me, so perforce I must go west for a little time, whether I like it or not. I can easily ride into town of an evening, and visit Adele."

With this intention, when Duval got quite to the foot of the hill, where Chalk Farm Tavern stood, he turned up a shady lane to his left, of which there are now no traces, and soon got across a few meadows to where Regent's Park now rears its aristocratic abodes. Then it was only a large tract of not very inviting fields, rather damp in bad weather.

Striking across these fields, he so easily made his way to the west end of the town, and came out into the western road about half a mile below Tyburn Gate.

"Good," he said, I have made a tolerably short cut of that, at any rate. Something seems to tell me that I shall have some luck on this road. I am glad I relinquished my original intention of going on northward to dine, for I should soon have had the whole country about my ears. I will make a stop at the Old Hats, at Ealing."

Having made this determination, Duval went down the road at an easy canter. He passed the old wall of Kensington Gardens, and rapidly leaving Bayswater behind him, he was quickly at Shepard's Bush, then a little straggling collection of about twenty houses only. He took the right-hand road and soon reached Acton, which was something, even then, of a village of importance, with its church standing more prominently forward than it does now.

A very short ride then brought him to the Old Hats, which then stood quite alone by the road side, and was an old-fashioned, long, straggling one-storyed house.

This hostel was well known at that time to the knights of the road, as being kept by a man who never asked any questions of any one who made no demur at the bill.

Duval drew up at the door, and the ostler at once made his appearance and took charge of his horse, while he strolled deliberately into the house, as though no price were on his head.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD HATS, AND WHAT HAPPENED THERE TO CLAUDE DUVAL.

"THAT'S Duval the highwayman," said the landlord of the Old Hats, as Claude descended from his horse at his door.

"You don't say so?" cried the landlady.

"Yes, I do, my dear."

"What, the famous Duval, the dashing highwayman, who is so fond of all the ladies, and such a very nice man!"

"Humph!"

"The good, handsome Duval—the——"

"My dear, he won't thank you to be bawling out his name in that sort of way, I am sure. It is enough that you and I know him, without letting everybody in the house into the secret of who he is; and you know likewise

perfectly well that young Mr. Schoffer is here now on his way to dine with the Lord Mayor; and his father, you know, as well as I can tell you, is Alderman Schoffer, so of course he would feel bound to try to apprehend Duval, and then only think what a pretty disturbance there would be in the house."

"He apprehend Claude Duval?" cried the landlady. "Why Duval would eat him up."

"Very likely, my dear, but would it do any good to our house to have the son of Alderman Schoffer eaten up in it by Claude Duval?"

"Well, who said it would?"

"Nobody, my love, only don't be bawling Duval's name out so loud, for we don't know what may come of it. You know our mode of carrying on business, is to charge well and ask no questions, and you know that no class of customers pay us better than the——"

"Knights of the Road," said the landlady.

"Precisely, my dear."

"I know all that quite as well as you do, and I am quite as little likely to do any mischief to any guest. As for young Mr. Schoffer, as I say, Duval, from what I have seen of him, would eat him up with half a grain of salt."

"Very likely, but——"

Tingle, tingle, tingle!

"Ah! there's the bell, I declare—it's the coffee-room bell, and young Mr. Schoffer is there. I only wish, wife, you had not kept me talking here, I would have met Duval, and got him to go into the bar-parlor, or some other room, but now——"

Tingle, tingle, tingle!

"Are you going to answer the bell, Peter, or is Mr. D. to pull it down, I ask you?"

"Coming, coming, coming!" cried the landlord, as he made a rush now to a long low-ceiled dingy room, that was called the coffee-room, because no drop of that beverage was ever within its doors, and there he found Duval taking off his riding gloves, and young Mr. Schoffer the alderman's son looking at him with amazement, for that young gentleman had been to school in Holland, and had very little experience of life. He probably thought no one would venture into the coffee-room at the Old Hats, while so very important a personage as himself was there.

"Well, landlord," said Claude, "have you anything very tempting in the house that one can have to eat?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"Why, sir, we have something of all sorts. There is a roast haunch of as fine mutton as you would wish to see."

"Uncut?"

"Oh yes, sir. Nobody but the cook has so much as looked at it; and then there is a——"

"Stop; don't let me hear any more. Bring me the haunch at once—one of your home-made loaves, and a bottle of your best claret. I only want a slight snack, and that will do very well for me—only pray be quick."

"Certainly, sir."

Young Mr. Schoffer by this time began to think that the new comer must be somebody, from the deference with which he was treated by the landlord, and his own off-handed manners. The young man was sufficiently new in the world to be completely taken in by dashing manners, whether in man or woman, so he thought he would do the civil thing by the new comer, with the hope of finding out who he was.

"A remarkably nice day, sir," he said.

"Very," replied Claude.

"Perhaps, sir, you would like to sit here, as it is more in the light? I will give you this seat, sir, if you prefer it."

"You are very kind," said Duval; "but where I am will do very well indeed. I would not incommod you on any account. What a time this tiresome landlord is to be sure. Here have I been waiting for dinner no less than three minutes and a-half."

As he spoke, Duval took from his pocket a superb watch, set in a circle of brilliants, and glanced at it.

"He must be some nobleman," thought young Schoffer. "I'll get into talk with him, and show him that I, too, have a watch."

With this he took out his watch, which, by comparison with Duval's, was but a very shabby affair; and by way of letting the supposed nobleman know that he was somebody, he said—

"How slow the time goes to be sure. My father, the alderman, told me to be at the Mansion House by five, and it is now only half past three. I am going to dine with the Lord Mayor, sir, you must know."

"Oh, indeed."

"Yes, sir. The old gentleman has got the gout, and can't go, so he gave me his invite, and I am to go, you see, sir; and he has written to the Lord Mayor to say as much, and his lordship sent back a very flattering reply indeed, saying he should be happy to see me."

"You don't say so, sir?"

"Oh yes, sir; it's true, upon my life. My father is Alderman Schoffer: a well-known man in the City, sir."

"Very likely, sir, indeed."

"Humph!" thought Schoffer. "I did think he'd be forced to tell me who he was, after I had said that. How close he is to be sure. I'll try him again, though." Then turning to Duval, he added, "My curriole, sir, is in the Innyard, and I am going to drive myself to town, you see, sir."

"Very probable."

"I have managed very nicely, I think, for I have put the card of invite in the box under the seat of the curriole, besides my white gloves and a charming bouquet. I rather think I am a bit of a manager—don't you think so, sir?"

"Your forethought," said Duval, "is only equalled by your subsequent discretion, my good sir."

"No—you really don't say so, sir?"

"Indeed I do; and your experience of the world will let you see at a glance that I am not the sort of man, my dear sir, to say what I do not think."

This compliment to young Mr. Schoffer's experience of the world quite won his heart; and if it be true, as some cynics have asserted, that mankind are always better pleased to be praised for those virtues and those qualities that they do not possess than for those that they do, the satisfaction that beamed from the young man's countenance is easily accounted for.

"Sir," he said, "you don't know how happy I should be to take a glass of wine with you."

"With great pleasure, sir," said Claude. "I will but just finish the little mack that I am taking, and then we will manage a couple of bottles of our host's claret here."

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

"I presume you have been in the army?"

"Not exactly, sir."

What not exactly being in the army could mean, Claude Duval did not stop to inquire. It was sufficient for him that the young gentleman was highly flattered at the supposition; and when Duval had finished his repast by mak-

ting a rather considerable inroad into the haunch of mutton, they both sat down by each other as comfortably as possible.

After a few glasses of the really excellent claret had been despatched, Claude Duval said—

"I have been riding so much to-day, that I feel really fatigued with that kind of exercise, and yet I must get to London."

"My dear sir," cried young Mr. Schoffer, upsetting his glass of claret on his pantaloons in his eagerness: "my dear sir, if you will condescend to accept of a seat in my curricle, I shall be proud of the honor of driving you to town."

"Really, sir, I fear that it would be too much of an intrusion upon your kindness."

"Not at all—not at all, sir. Only say that you will do it, that's all, my dear sir."

"Well, since you are so very kind as to make me such an offer, and in so gentlemanly a way, too, I feel that I ought not to think of refusing it."

"Of course not, sir, of course not; and I hope you will not think of such a thing for a moment. You cannot think, sir, how very comfortable two can ride in my curricle. I have no servant with me, because I always can put up the horse and vehicle at father's old shop—I—I mean in the city—dear me."

"Exactly, sir. Shall we have another bottle? Claret is not a very insidious wine."

"Why, really, sir, I'm almost afraid to venture, as I shall have to drink a good deal of wine at the Mansion-house, for the Lord Mayor is sure to keep his eye on me, and to cry out—'Come, come, Mr. Schoffer, don't shirk your glass.'"

"Very likely."

"Yes, sir. Our present Lord Mayor actually began life by dealing in rags and bottles."

"You don't say so."

"Yes, and so he got on by degrees, until he is the great man he is now; and they do say that in a box under the bed, he still preserves the original black-dolly that used to swing outside his door in the Minories, where he first set up in business."

"It shows a proper and profound humility. How did he get on in his business then?"

"Oh, very well indeed. They say he swindled—no—I mean he got the better in business, and you know, sir, in business that nothing that keeps to the windward of the law is swindling."

"Certainly not."

"Well, sir, he got the better of everybody, and from one thing to another, he deserted the bottle business, and took contracts for the army."

"That I should think was profitable."

"Oh, yes, sir, there was not a pair of breeches went to our army in Flanders but were made by the present Lord Mayor of London."

"Really, I quite congratulate you upon the useful and ornamental position in which your house stood with the military character of the nation."

"Thank you, sir, you are very good."

"Not at all; modest minds like yours should always be properly appreciated, in my opinion. Permit me to hand you the decanter."

"Thank you."

The young scion of the city house, had not a head-piece that was either proof against Duval's flattery or the claret which was so liberally administered to him, and he soon showed signs of having had quite enough. It was no part of Duval's scheme to render him quite helpless.

"Bless me," said Duval, suddenly looking at his watch. "It is time to start for London."

"Is it!" cried young Schoffer, starting to his feet. "Let's be off then. My curricle! Hilloa, there, my curricle!"

"All right," said the landlord. "It is at the door."

CHAPTER V.

DUVAL MAKES A GOOD THING OF A MANSION-HOUSE DINNER.

IN the course of another five minutes Duval and his new friend were seated in the curricle together. The young man took the reins—nobody is so tenacious of driving as a half drunken man—and away they went at a good pace from the Old Hats.

The open air, however, soon began to have a very insidious effect upon the head-piece of Schoffer, and from the manner in which he swayed from side to side, it was quite evident to Duval that in the event of their meeting any other vehicle upon the road, the chances of a collision were hardly doubtful.

"Well," he said, suddenly. "I have had a lesson. This is beautiful."

"A lesson?" said Schoffer, speaking thickly. "A lesson, my dear friend, did you say? What's—what's beautiful?"

"Your driving; and as I have had the advantage of seeing it, of course I have had a lesson in the art."

"Oh, ah, yes, to be sure. Come up, will you! I rather think there are not many, sir, who can come near me in this sort of thing."

"Not one."

"No, really though, you ain't joking?"

"Joking? Perish the thought."

"Then you do think I drive rather uncommon well?"

"I am certain of it; and I have, contingent upon that occasion, a very great favor to ask of you, my friend."

"Name it—what—is—is—it?"

"It is that you would let me try to put in practice the admirable lesson in driving that you have given me, by allowing me to take the reins for a minute or two only, now that we are still in the country. I own that with you by my side I should feel very diffident about driving in London, but here nobody sees us."

The young dupe smiled blandly.

"Well—well," he hiccuped, "nobody sees us here; I don't mind for once in a way. There, my fr—friend. Take the whip and reins, and I will tell you when you go—go wrong, I will."

"A thousand thanks for that kindness," said Duval, as he took the whip and reins from the hands of the young man. "There now, how stupid I am."

"What's the row?"

"I have dropped the whip, and owing to sitting in an awkward position I have got the cramp in the calf of my right leg, and can't move. Oh, oh!"

"I have had the cramp in my calf sometimes," said Schoffer.

"Then it must have been all over you," said Duval. "My dear friend, will you get the whip?"

"To be sure I will. Don't you move. All's right. I'll get it. Don't you trouble yourself, my dear friend, I'll get it in a moment. All's right. Some

people couldn't have taken as much claret as I have and been so decidedly so—sober—very sober."

He rolled, rather than stepped out of the curriole, and the moment he gained the road, Duval made a slight noise with his lips, and at the same instant gently jerked the reins, and off went the horses in the curriole at a sharp trot, leaving the unfortunate owner of the vehicle in the middle of the road with the whip in his hand, glaring after it, as it rapidly retreated from his sight, in such a state of bewilderment that he was unable even to cry out about it.

Duval never even troubled himself to look back. He was quite satisfied that pursuit was out of the question, and he knew that Schoffer was not so tipsy as not to be able to take care of himself so far as regarded any danger to life or limb, so that he looked upon the whole affair as quite a professional thing.

Tyburn Gate was very soon gained, and then Duval thought it was time to think upon what he was to do to carry out the plan he had determined upon in his own mind of going to dine with the Lord Mayor in the character of young Schoffer. He recollects that in the plenitude of his foolish confidence the young owner of the curriole had mentioned that under one of the seats were his gloves and his card of admission to the banquet at the Mansion House; and now Duval drew up at an Inn some few paces up the Edgware Road, and pausing at the door, he made the examination of the seat and found the articles named.

Fortunately Duval, by merely getting rid of his riding-boots, was in a fit dress to go to the city feast. To be sure, he wanted a pair of shoes and another cravat, and then he would do very well, but both of these appendages to his costume were easily enough to be got in London.

Leaving the curriole in charge of the ostler at the door of the Inn, he entered it, and gave his order for a bottle of wine and for a hair-dresser to be sent for. The style of the 'turn out' at once insured him every attention, and the best hair-dresser in the whole neighborhood was speedily in attendance.

"My good fellow," said Claude Duval, "I want you to dress and powder my hair for an evening assembly, and I want you to take a couple of guineas and get me a pair of dress shoes and a lace cravat."

"Oh, yes, sir; certainly, sir."

"The change, if any, I desire that you will be good enough to keep for your trouble."

This was quite sufficient to induce the barber to obey the order of so munificent a customer with the greatest possible alacrity, and in the course of twenty minutes Duval was fully accommodated with all that he required. The curriole was at the door, the horses having been refreshed with a little hay and water, and off went our hero again at a slashing pace to the city.

At that time the Mansion was easier to get at than now, when you have to thrust your way through an army of omnibuses and cabs. The streets of the city were bustling and animated, but that was all. There was none of the wild rushing of vehicles which characterizes the present day. Without, then, being forced materially to relax his speed, Duval got to the Poultry. There he certainly found a collection of carriages conveying persons to the banquet.

A constable stepped up to him, and exhibiting a little gilt staff, he said to him respectfully—

"Sir, you cannot pass this way; you must go down King Street, unless you are going to the Mansion House."

"But I am," said Duval.

"Beg pardon, sir: will you be so good as show me your card?"

"Oh, yes; certainly."

The constable looked at the card, and then in a lord voice, he cried—

"Make way for Mr. Schoffer—way for Mr. Schoffer to the porch. Make way; move on."

This was a common form observed there to all the guests, and was for the purpose of keeping the route as clear as possible, as well as informing the servants who were drawn up at the door of the Mansion House, who it was that had arrived.

"I want some one to take charge of my carriage," said Duval; "and to take it to some livery stable."

"I'll see to that, sir," said a man in the Lord Mayor's livery.

"Very good."

"Mr. Schoffer!" cried a tall footman, as Duval entered the Mansion House "Mr. Schoffer!" shouted another, as he went up stairs. "Mr. Schoffer!" bawled a third, and he entered a brilliantly-lighted room, where there was an assemblage of at least a hundred persons waiting for the welcome and momentarily expected announcement of dinner being on the table.

"Ah, Mr. Schoffer!" said a little fat man advancing, "glad to see you in the City again. Hilloa!"

Duval bowed.

"Why, you—you are not my old friend Schoffer!—You—you—"

"I am his son, sir," said Duval.

"Bless my heart and life, my dear boy, I am very glad to see you, indeed—very glad. And how is your worthy father?"

"As well as the gout, sir, will let him be. He has sent me as his unworthy representative here."

"Unworthy? dear me, no—no—not at all. Come this way, and I will introduce you to the Lord Mayor."

"I shall esteem it a great honor, sir. May I be so rude as to inquire the name of my father's old friend? He will be sure to ask me who it was that treated me so kindly."

"Oh, yes, to be sure. Tell him it was Sheriff Buggins."

"I will, sir; and permit me to say that this is the proudest moment of my life, when I find myself treated with such distinguished courtesy by no other than the great Sheriff Buggins."

"My dear young Mr. Schoffer, really such penetration at your age is truly wonderful; my young friend, I will likewise introduce you to the City Remembrancer, so called on account of forgetting everything. Come along.

With this, the exemplary sheriff led Duval to the Lord Mayor, to whom he formally introduced him. His lordship held out one finger for Duval to shake; but as Duval saw the pompous and insulting trick, he only met it by one of his own fingers; so that the most comical effect in the world was produced. The Lord Mayor was one of those large, pompous men who acquire a reputation for amazing sagacity by scarcely ever opening their lips. He only glared at Duval.

"A long-headed man, the Lord Mayor," whispered Sheriff Buggins confidently to Duval.

"Yes, and thick, too," replied Duval.

"Oh, very, very."

"So I thought. I am much obliged to you for this kind introduction, and I am quite sure, my father will be very much pleased, indeed."

"Don't name it, my dear young sir. You must come and see me and the girls at Twickenham—Mrs. Sheriff Buggins will be quite delighted, and so will the girls."

"And so shall I, sir."

"Look—look—look!"
"At what, sir?—where?"

"The Lord Mayor is consulting his watch. We shall soon now have dinner announced. That watch, sir, cost three hundred pounds. It is studded with diamonds; and inside the outer-case is the Lord Mayor's arms, two donkeys on a field azure, and an owl for a crest, with the motto of 'Business is business.'"

"Hem!" said the lord Mayor.

A buzz of approbation at this remark ran through the assembly, under cover of which Duval said to himself—

"I will have that watch, and if possible, the gold chain that that piece of hog's flesh they call the Lord Mayor has round his neck—

Duval was not without hopes of getting something from the worthy sheriff likewise, and some of the other guests looked promising in the way of watches and pocket-books; so that, upon the whole, Duval was not without a hope of paying himself very well for his trouble in coming to the Mansion House.

"Dinner waits!" cried a loud voice at the door of the drawing-room, in which the guests were assembled.

If etiquette and the customary form of English gentry would have permitted such a thing, what a grand rush there would have been; but they were a little too civilized for that. England is not vulgar, and so the guests, according to rank, proceeded in a long, gay, sparkling, procession to the feast. Duval took care to keep very close to his friend the sheriff, by which means he secured a capital place at the principal table close to the Lord Mayor.

"I beg pardon, sir," said a lacquey to Duval, "but that seat was reserved for the Recorder."

"Eh?" said Duval.

"That seat, sir, was reserved for the Recorder."

"Oh thank you," said Duval. "I am very comfortable; I don't at all prefer the corner."

"Deaf as a badger," said the funkey, and he moved away to state the difficulties of the case to the learned personage whom it concerned, and who it appeared laughed it off, and left Duval in his seat, for he was not interrupted again.

The feast now began, and Duval was truly astonished to see the great execution which the guests did upon the rich viands that were placed at their disposal. He ate but very little himself, for his mind was intent upon some plan of operation by which he could contrive to possess himself of the Lord Mayor's watch; the chain and seals of which hung temptingly out of his fob. He did not sit absolutely next to his lordship, so it was by no means easy. A cabinet minister occupied the post of honor, but luckily for Duval that personage all the time he was there was in a perfect agony to get away, and left as soon as with any decency he could.

Duval popped into the vacant chair in a moment, and the sheriff joined up close.

"Hem?" remarked the Lord Mayor again.

CHAPTER VI.

A LITTLE DISTURBANCE IN THE CITY.—DUVAL'S ESCAPE.

It was quite evident to Duval that his worship the Lord Mayor considered that a great breach of etiquette had been committed by Duval taking possession of the vacant chair of the minister of state, and that the "Hem!" was the mode in which he so expressed himself.

Under any other circumstances, Duval would not have troubled himself upon the occasion; but now he had an object in view, and leaning towards the Lord Mayor, he said—

"My lord, I was stopped on Ealing Common, as I came here, by the celebrated Claude Duval."

"Ah," said the Lord Mayor.

"I should not trouble your lordship with so very trivial a circumstance were it not that after robbing me, Duval said—'I know, Mr. Schoffer, where you are going, and you can tell the Lord Mayor that I fully intend to dine with him to-day.'"

The Lord Mayor upon this gathered in all the breath his lungs would hold, and puffed out his cheeks like a grampus, looking unutterable things the while. He stared at Duval as though he would eat him up, and then in a low mumbling voice like distant thunder, he said—

"Claude Duval, the highwayman, dine with me?"

"He said so, my lord."

"Bah!"

"Exactly, my lord. I consider that last remark of yours as highly intelligent and satisfactory; but for all that, Claude Duval, who they do say would keep his word in such a particular if he died for it, declared his intention of dining with you to-day."

The color slightly faded from the face of the Civic King, and he ran his eye along the line of familiar faces on each side of the table, almost expecting to find some strange physiognomy among them that should seem like what he could picture to himself Duval's would be; but no, all were known. He never thought for a moment of suspecting his informant; besides, had not Sheriff Buggins introduced him as young Mr. Schoffer? and that was conclusive.

"He not only, my lord, swore he would be here, but that he would rob you of your diamond ring."

"My ring—my ring!"

"Yes, my Lord, that one on your finger which becomes you so well, and which upon no other finger would look as it does; and if Duval—"

"Hush, don't speak so loud, young man. I don't want all the world to know that it is possible any highwayman could have the impudence to come here."

"Impudence indeed, your worship. It shall go no farther."

"I would not lose this ring for a thousand pounds—No."

As he spoke, he drew it from his finger and handed it to Duval to look at. The guests at the table, in the midst of the clatter of knives and forks, and the constant changing of plates, paid no attention to the whispered conference between the Lord Mayor and his neighbor, young Schoffer. It was not then that the attention of his worship was required to the general company. After dinner it would have been quite another thing.

"It is a handsome ring," said Duval, "a very handsome ring, indeed."

As he said this he dropped it on to the floor, at the feet of the Lord Mayor.

"My ring—my ring," said his lordship, as he stooped to pick it up.

Claude stooped at the same time, and adroitly drew the gorgeous watch from the fob of the Lord Mayor, who was so intent upon picking up his ring that he never missed it, or felt the slightest movement of it escaping."

"I am sorry your lordship troubled yourself to stoop," said Duval; "I would have got it in a moment for you."

"Don't mention it," said his lordship, looking almost purple with the exertion of stooping. "I would not lose it for a thousand pounds, that I would not—eugh."

"It was very awkward of me to be sure to drop it."

"Don't mention that, sir—don't mention that, sir. Do you think you should know this Claude Duval if you were to see him again?"

"Oh, yea."

"Ha, that is a very good thing indeed. Just look around you and tell me if you observe him."

Duval affected to look very carefully all along the tables, and then he shook his head dubiously.

"I should hardly think, my lord, that he has ventured to come. I don't see anything of him."

"Hem! I'm very glad of it indeed."

"The probability, my lord, is that he will hide somewhere, and pounce upon you when you least expect it."

"Gracious! in my private room perhaps."

"Nothing more likely. I hope you will permit me to accompany you there to look for him. If you could take him into custody it would be very much talked of. There could be no danger here, I should say."

"Let me think," said the Lord Mayor. "Ah—hem! Mr. Sheriff, will you have the goodness to take my chair for a few moments?"

"Certainly, my lord. I am much honoured."

"Come," added the Lord Mayor, to Duval, "follow me. We will, at all events, give such directions as shall prevent the possibility of his escape if he is now in the Mansion House, or of his entrance into it if he is not—hem!"

Duval followed the Lord Mayor through a little door in the end of the dining hall, and after traversing a short passage, they reached a small room, which was lighted by an elegant lamp upon the table.

"Now, my young friend," said the Lord Mayor, closing the door, "what do you advise?"

"Are we quite alone, my lord?"

"Oh, quite—quite."

"And can no one overhear us?"

"This, sir, is my private room, and no one presumes to overhear anything that takes place within it—hem!"

"Then, sir, I would advise you not to make the smallest resistance, but to take things perfectly easy."

"Eh? What do you mean, sir?"

"That I am Claude Duval!"

"Ah!" cried the Lord Mayor, and staggering back, he fell into the recesses of a great arm chair.

For a moment Duval thought he would have fainted away, but he did not. His face only assumed a purple hue, and his eyes opened particularly wide, and he glared upon Duval as though he would devour him.

"Yes, my lord," added Duval, in a low cautious tone, "I am Claude Duval. I said I would dine with you, and I have dined with you; I said I would have your diamond ring, and—I have it."

As he spoke, he slipped the magnificent ring from the finger of the bewil-
dered Lord Mayor.

"I said I would have your gold chain, and lo ! I have that likewise ; and
now, my Lord Mayor, upon your making the least outcry for the next half
hour or so, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of throttling you.

His lordship only groaned slightly.

"I have the honor to bid you good evening, my lord. Your dinner was
excellent—your wines first-rate, and I must say that I have enjoyed myself
very much indeed.

"He—has—enjoyed himself," gasped the Lord Mayor. "Hem ! Oh—
oh—ah!"

Duval suddenly started, for a confused clamor of many voices came upon
his ears. The more he listened the louder the sounds grew, and then stepping
to the door of the private room he opened it a little way and listened.
He could hear that it was from the dining hall that the confusion of voices
proceeded, and feeling confident that, with amazement and terror combined,
the Lord Mayor was incapable of making any resistance, or giving any alarm,
he walked hastily down the narrow passage connecting the private room with
the banquet hall, and listened at the door that led into it.

"Yes, gentlemen," he heard a voice say—"He left me in the road and drove
off with my curriicle, and I do believe he is a highwayman. I am young Mr.
Schoffer, I can prove it. He is a highwayman. I have walked all the way,
till I got a hackney-coach at the top of Oxford Street. Oh, gentlemen, I am
an injured individual."

Duval easily recognised the voice of young Schoffer, and for the moment
he felt rather undecided what to do.

"Justice," shouted Schoffer. "My curriicle—my horse—my card of admis-
sion—my gloves—my everything. I had to bawl out thieves at the top of
my voice, before I could get into this place at all, and now I bawl out mur-
der!"

About thirty voices said something all at once, and Duval felt all over the
door for some mode of fastening it.

"Where is the Lord Mayor!" shouted some half-dozen people at once.
"Where is the Lord Mayor!"

"I only hope," thought Duval, as he shot a small bolt into the socket,
"that you won't find the Lord Mayor yet awhile."

With a conviction, then, that there must be some other mode of outlet
from the Mayor's private room than through the banqueting hall, Duval
returned thither, and found his lordship still seated on the large chair, and
looking about him as before.

A glance showed Duval a small door opposite to the one at which he had
entered, but he had hardly time to reach it, before he heard a crash, and felt
certain that the little door leading from the banqueting hall to the narrow
passage was broken open. There was now no time to lose.

"All's not lost that are in danger," said Duval as he pulled open the little
door and darted through it. He closed it after him, and finding a key in the
lock upon the outer side he rapidly turned it, and then hurried along totally
in the dark. He knew the Mansion House was a tolerably modern building,
and that he was not likely to fall down any trap-doors or secret places, so he
darted on, heedless of the total darkness, until he came bump against a wall.

"Where there is a wall," he said, "there is a door somewhere, so I have
but to go on feeling for it. I must take care, though, that I do not make a
precipitate tumble down some staircase."

As Duval was on the first floor of the building, this was by far the greatest
risk that he ran ; but he came to the handle of a door, which he tried to

turn, but found it fast. As he stood for a few moments quite still, he heard a rattle spring fiercely.

"What the deuce are they at?" he said. "Do they want to summon all the watchmen of the city?"

He made another attempt at the door and shook it. From the manner in which it shook, he felt confident it was only slightly fastened, so, placing his shoulder against it, he forced it at once open with a crash. The room beyond it was quite dark, and the first thing that Duval did was to tumble over a chair.

"Confound the chair," he cried.

Almost as he spoke, a door nearly opposite to him suddenly flashed open, and he saw right in the banqueting hall. How he had got round to it again he could not conceive, but there was really no time for reflection. The danger was imminent, for a number of persons armed in different ways, were about to come through that doorway.

As Duval was in the dark they could not see him, and he had time and presence of mind enough to shrink back before any flash of light could fall upon him. He had now no resource but to go on pursuing the wall, and as he did so, he reached the head of a flight of stairs, and slipped down several of them.

He heard the trampling of feet behind him, and once he had heard quite distinctly, a loud voice say—

"No doubt it is Claude Duval, as the Mayor says."

"Ah," thought Duval, "they know me then do they? Well, they will not get me quite so easily for all that now, I take it."

He flew rather than walked down the flight of stairs now, and was in a moment or two at the foot of them. A faint light, as if reflected from some apartment, flashed upon him, and a man came towards him with a branch candlestick carrying three lights in his hand.

"Who's that?" cried the man.

"I" cried Claude, and rushing forward he knocked him down, candlestick and all, before he could say another word.

"Stop him!" shouted another voice.

Claude drew the dress sword he wore, and dashed on. He came to another little flight of steps, but they ascended instead of descending, and then he bounced into a room in which were some dozen of lackeys. One of the windows was open, and a glance told Duval that it looked out into the landing of the stone steps in front of the Mansion House. Turning to the lackeys for a moment, he cried—

"If any one is in love with death let him follow me!" and then he sprang out into the open air.

"There he is! there he is!" cried a hundred voices.

CHAPTER VII.

DUVAL'S GREAT PERIL IN THE CITY, AND STRANGE PLACE OF REFUGE.

DUVAL felt at the moment just a little staggered at the exigence of his position, but he felt that if anything was to be done for his safety it must be done at once. Each moment brought with it many dangers.

Without more hesitation, then, than was sufficient to let him see his way down, he rushed from the elevated portion of the Mansion House, and reached the street. One man made a plunge at him, crying—"I have him."

"Not yet," said Duval, as he ran him through the breast with the sword he still had possession of.

The man fell back with a groan, and his fate seemed rather to stagger those who were pressing on with speed, and a lane was kept for Duval, through which he made his way, brandishing the sword. In this way he darted down Mansionhouse Street, and gained Bucklersbury before anyone could muster courage enough to lay hold of him. There was one thing, however, that had a prejudicial effect upon his safety, and that was that he kept the drawn sword still in his hand.

A watchman in Bucklersbury threw himself in his way, crying—

"Just stop a bit."

"Out of the path, idiot!" cried Duval.

"Not quite so foolish," said the watchman, and he made a blow at Duval with his bludgeon.

Duval did not want to kill him, but he caught the bludgeon in its descent, and twisting it out of the hands of the watchman he dealt him a blow on the head with it that sent him reeling into the roadway.

A loud shout behind him now warned him that the mob and the officers were close upon his heels. He paused for a moment at the corner of a court to take breath.

"Whither shall I fly?" he said. "Of a truth I did not exactly calculate upon being thus hunted through the streets of London. This is something more than a perilous adventure, and how it will end yet has to be seen."

"Stop him! stop him! Stop thief!" cried many voices.

"Indeed! Well, be it so; I will run, and let the peril be his who is fool enough to overtake me."

Duval dashed down the court.

He had not the remotest idea where the court led to, but he took it at a venture. It was only when some distance down it that he thought of the rather disagreeable chance of its having no outlet. Suddenly he came to what appeared the end of it, and he paused irresolutely.

A boy was standing upon a doorstep, and to him Duval said—

"Can't I get out of this court but by going back?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said the boy, pointing to what looked like a doorway. "There is the way out. It leads into Cannon Street."

"Stop him! stop him! A highwayman!" chorussed a crowd of voices, and Duval had just time to dart off in the direction the boy had pointed out to him, when his foes rushed down the court in a dense throng.

The little alley into which he had plunged was so dark that for a moment he thought the boy had deceived him, but as he ran on he found such was not the case, for the passage widened, and he got into another court somewhat similar in size to the first one he had at such a venture darted down.

Then in a moment or two, he got into Cannon Street, along which he went at a great rate; but the mob kept close upon his heels, and the worst of the affair was, that it was a time of night so very few passengers were in the streets, that he, as he ran, became quite a marked object, and his dress sufficed to attract the observation of the few people he did chance to meet.

If he had seen any open door he would not for a moment have hesitated to enter the house to which it belonged; but none such presented itself, and he was compelled to rush on a fugitive, hunted through the streets of the City. And now he heard behind him a hard and rapid tread upon the pavement, and upon looking round, he saw one man, who had outran all the others, and was gaining fast upon him. This man did not speak, for well he knew that by doing so he should only lose his wind, and so incapacitate himself for continuing the chase.

"He runs well," thought Claude Duval. "Perhaps he would like to be a little in advance."

With these inuttered words, Duval slackened his pace a little as though he were quite exhausted, upon which the man, with a short cry of satisfaction, made superhuman efforts to come up with him.

Gradually Duval let him get nearer, and he heard him say—

"The reward will be mine."

Suddenly then, with the rapidity of lighting, Duval dropped upon his hands and knees on the pavement, and in an instant the fast runner, who was unable to check his headlong speed, flew over him, and went rolling and scudding along the pavement heavily for about twenty feet, when he was caught by a post, which knocked the little remaining breath he had completely out of his body.

"How do you feel now, my friend?" said Duval, as he walked leisurely past him.

The man was incapable of answering a word, for he was effectually stunned by the fall he had had, and there Duval left him lying, without seeking to inflict any further injury upon him.

Duval now hoped that he had distanced his foes, and thrown them off the scent. He looked about him to see where he was, but he was not sufficiently conversant with the City to feel quite certain upon that point, so, at a venture, he took the first turning that he came to. He found that that brought him out close to St. Paul's Church-yard, and he had time to assure himself that it was the cathedral he was close to, when from Cheapside about twenty people suddenly turned, and exclaimed—

"There he is! There he is! Seize him! Hold him, somebody. Stop thief—stop him!"

Duval had sufficiently recovered now to be in good breath, so off he started round St. Paul's, hoping to get into Newgate Market, and amidst its intricacies, find some mode of baffling his pursuers.

He did, by great swiftness, reach Paternoster-row, but some of his enemies kept close upon his heels, and as he fled down Ave Maria Lane he was compelled to turn and face the men who pressed him closely.

Here it was that Duval gave evidence of that great personal strength which, to look at him, no one would believe he possessed, and which he only put forth when very much pressed or very much angered.

He seized the foremost of the two men, and fairly lifting him off his feet he flung him with such force against the other that they both fell, grievously hurt, and bellowing for assistance. Duval by that action got a start of nearly the whole length of Ave Maria Lane, and he came out into Newgate Street. He then ran round the corner of the Old Bailey, and when there he paused to listen which route his pursuers had taken. He soon found that some were coming after him down Newgate Street, while from Ludgate Hill another party of some thirty or forty persons advanced with furious cries.

Duval now showed that remarkable presence of mind and daring which had preserved him in many dangers. He hit upon a scheme, the daring inscience of which was almost certain to make it succeed. He knew that day and night warders were up in the lobby of Newgate, and that a light was there, so he boldly ascended the rugged stone steps, and knocked authoritatively at the little wicket.

"Who's there?" growled a voice from within.

"A gentleman from the sheriff," said Duval, in a clear voice; and then in a moment the door was opened, and the turnkey, with a very much softened voice, said—

"Pray, sir, walk in. Anything amiss, sir?"

"Not much," said Duval. "I suppose the governor is asleep by this time—is he not?"

"Why no, sir. He is at my Lord Mayor's entertainment at the Mansion; but Mr. Smithers, who acts for him, is only lying down, sir, in his room."

"Take me to him at once, then," said Duval. "I have a message to him from the sheriff."

"Yes, sir. Hilloa, Watkins!"

"Here you is!" said a half drowsy man, getting up from a bench upon which he had been indulging himself with a nap. "Here you is. What's the row now, old fellow—eh?"

"Show this gentleman to Mr. Smithers' room, Watkins. He comes from the sheriff with a message."

Upon this intimation, Mr. Watkins was all alive; and, indeed, the appearance of Duval in his handsome apparel was quite sufficient to give a color to what he said, so Mr. Watkins went before him with a light, and after conducting him through some windings and turnings, paused at the door of the room, and tapped at it.

"Come in," said a voice.

Watkins open the door, and said in an humble voice—

"A gentleman from the sheriff, sir, if you please."

"Oh! ask him to walk in. Pray be seated, sir. I hope nothing is amiss in the city?"

"Nothing of material consequence, I believe, sir," said Duval; "but it has been proved that, by some means, the notorious and impudent Olande Duval has found his way to-night into the Mansion House; some say he has left, and some say he remains, and that it is a companion of his who has left; and so my Lord Mayor and the sheriff have requested me to ask you if you have any one here who knows him by sight, and if so that you will be good enough to send such a person at once to the Mansion House."

"Certainly, certainly, sir." I do think we have several officers in the prison who can recognize him. Will you excuse me a moment, sir, and I will give the necessary orders?"

"Oh, of course. Pray do not hurry yourself upon my account, for I have made such speed from the Mansion here on foot, not being able to find my carriage in the Poultry, that I am really glad of a little rest."

"Pray draw near to the fire, sir, and make yourself quite at home. I shall be back in a few moments."

"Humph!" said Duval, when he found himself alone; "I am to make myself at home, am I? Well, I should not wonder, but that is just what I shall have to do in reality some of these days in this not very comfortable building. However, I think that by this rather hazardous adventure I have distanced and outwitted my pursuers. A capital fire, this—Egad, I will make myself at home, too."

With this he drew a chair near the fire, but he took good care to keep an eye upon the door, and an ear upon any sound that might apprise him of danger.

Such precautions were, however, quite unnecessary, for Mr. Smithers had not the remotest suspicion regarding the genuineness of the mission upon which Duval said he had come. In about five minutes, back he came.

"I have sent three of our officers, sir," he said, "who know Duval by sight very well, indeed; and if he be still in the Mansion House among the guests, you may depend they will find him out."

"His lordship will be very much obliged to you, indeed," said Duval, "for this promptitude, and I only hope that they may be as successful as their zeal deserves."

"It seems," said Mr. Smithers, "to be the general idea that he has

escaped, and is somewhere in the street; for a mob of thirty or forty people has just passed Newgate, shouting for him, and no doubt eager to catch him, on account of the large reward that has been offered for his apprehension."

"That is their motive no doubt, sir. But the Lord Mayor is decidedly of opinion that he is still in the Mansion House."

"If so, sir, you may depend my officers will have him."

"I am rejoiced to hear it."

Duval now intimated that he must leave; but he kept protracting the time by thanking Mr. Smithers in the most engaging manner for the kind alacrity with which he had acted upon the occasion; and Smithers fancying by the and appearance of Duval, that he must be some person of consequence, very mirror of urbanity and suavity.

At length Duval thought that all danger from the mob must have ceased, and he gave a slight shiver, as he said—

“I shall feel cold, I daresay in the night air, going back.”

“My dear, sir,” said Smithers, “will you do me the favor to accept a loan of a cloak? I have one quite at your service.”

CHAPTER VIII.

DUVAL GETS TO THE OLD HATS, AND RESCUES HIS HORSE.

DUVAL could scarcely refrain from a smile at the great alacrity of the Deputy Governor of Newgate to assist him in his escape, by lending him a cloak to cover up his evening dress.

“My good, sir,” he said, “you are very kind, and if I thought it would not be putting you to any inconvenience——”

“Oh, none in the least.”

“Then, sir, I accept your kind offer with pleasure, and perhaps you will add to your kindness by letting somebody fetch a hackney-coach for me?”

“Of course, sir, I was just going to propose it. I will fetch the cloak in a moment if you please.”

“Mighty complacent,” thought Duval, when he was once more alone. “Now this fellow will be ready to eat his own head off when he finds what a mistake he has made. In good truth it was a lucky thought this of coming to Newgate. But here he is; I must be careful not to abate in my assumption of a good character to the last. By-the-by it will look bad not to give him some name.”

Mr. Smithers made his appearance with a large and handsome cloak upon his arm. It was made of blue cloth, and lined with rich crimson plush.

“This, sir,” he said, “will at all events keep the cold out, and a coach will be ready in a few moments.”

“I do not know how to thank you for this kindness,” said Duval, as he put on the cloak. “You shall have this back in the course of to-morrow. My name is Franks—Sir Willoughby Franks.”

Mr. Smithers bowed.

“It don’t look exactly the thing for a baronet to be running about the streets of the City at night; but you must know, this Duval actually stopped Lady Franks one night upon Ealing Common, and the Lord Mayor knowing that I felt rather sore upon that matter, said to me, ‘Sir Willoughby, I am quite sure you will do anything to capture Claude Duval.’ ‘Indeed my lord,’ I said, ‘I will.’ ‘Then,’ he added, ‘if you don’t mind taking your carriage and going as far as Newgate, you will do us good service.’ So you see I came.”

“Yes, Sir Willoughby. It was very good of you to come, indeed.”

“The coach is ready, sir,” said a man at the door.

“And so am I,” said Duval, “Mr. Smithers, good night. Lady Franks and myself will be very glad to see you at our little park close by Watford at any time that may suit your convenience. Nay, my dear sir, I beg that you will not leave your room to see me off. Now, really!”

“But allow me, sir—the honor.”

“My good sir.”

Mr. Smithers would insist upon it, and accordingly with all due ceremony Duval was seen to the door of Newgate, where a hackney-coach, the driver of which had been awakened from a comfortable snooze on his stand by

Fleet Market, was in waiting. In got Claude, and then waving his hand to Smithers, he said in a loud voice to the coachman—

"Drive to the Mansion House as quickly as you can, my friend. Good night, Mr. Smithers. Good night."

"Good night, Sir Willoughby."

Off went the coach, and the wicket-gate of Newgate was shut, to keep out the cold night air that rather set in that direction. The moment the coach got half way up Newgate Street, Duval pulled the check-string, and the driver pulled up.

"Did you go for to want anythink, sir?"

"Yes, my friend, I have altered my mind; I wont ga to the Mansion, but if you will drive me to the corner of Oxford Street, I will give you a guinea for the job."

"Won't I, your honor? All's right. Lor, if this isn't the governor o' Newgate, I'm smothered. He's arter some cove now, I'll be bound, as has been and gone and done somethink in the robbery line, or the murdering for all I knows on."

The horses' heads were turned in the direction of Holborn, and Duval was fast carried away from the scene of his dangers in the City. He wrapped the cloak well around him, for the night was very chilly, and as the vehicle rumbled up Holborn Hill, he could hardly keep from laughing aloud, to think how easily he had duped the Deputy Governor of Newgate.

The coach made good progress, and they reached the corner of Oxford Street in perfect safety; but as they turned into that then tolerable thoroughfare, Duval heard the sound of horses' feet in the direction of Holborn.

He had kept both the glasses of the coach down, in order that nothing might impede him in hearing if any pursuit were attempted, and he now placed his ear outside one of them and listened intently. He became convinced that some three or four horsemen were on the road, but whether they were after him or not, of course he had no possible means of judging.

Suspicion haunts the guilty mind, and Duval could not help fancying that he was pursued.

"It is possible," he thought, "that some suspicion may have arisen; and if so, I will die game at all events." The thought then struck him that he might make a friend of the coachman, and accordingly he carefully let down one of the front windows, just touched him on the arm, as he said—

"My friend, a word with you."

"Oh, lor! How you did frighten me to be sure, sir. I was thinking, yot see, and in what you calls a brown study, and didn't expect nobody to say nothink."

"Listen to me. If any one should stop you, and ask you if you took up a fare at Newgate, it will be a five pound note in your way to say 'No!'"

"Will it, sir?"

"Yes, and here it is. You can keep it whether you are asked the question or not; but mind, no shuffling."

"Lor bless you, sir, shuffling? No, indeed! Haven't I got a matter o' nine babies at home, and did I ever so much as see a five *rum* note in all my life? Oh, no, sir; only you say what I am to do and I'll do it."

"Then in plain language, I suspect that you may be stopped and questioned, and I don't want anybody to know that I am here, or where I came from. I will leave the management of the affair to you."

"All's right, sir! I suppose as you is the Governor of the stone jug, and arter some desperate rum un!"

"Exactly."

Duval resumed his seat, but he carefully felt the priming of his pistols, for he felt a sort of presentment that some danger of not a very common-place

character was at hand ; and with all his usual strength of mind, his very mode of life had tended to make him rather superstitious.

"I hold the lives of two men in my hands at all events," he said, "and woe be to those who may tempt me too far. I will have, and I have had, great forbearance, but I will not be hunted like a wild beast to the death without turning upon my pursuers."

The horsemen had turned into Oxford Street, and in a few moments Duval was quite convinced that his suspicions that they were after him were correct, for one of them cried out with a loud voice—

"Coach ! Coach ! Stop ! Coach there!"

The coachman paid not the remotest attention to the cry to him to stop, nor did he urge his horses a bit the faster. He treated the matter just with cool indifference, and heard it as though he heard it not.

But the horsemen were tolerably well mounted, and were not to be baulked in that sort of way, and as of course any attempt to escape with a couple of hackney coach horses would have been truly ridiculous, the mounted men soon reached the vehicle, and one riding to the head of the horses, stopped them. Another spoke angrily to the coachman.

"Why did you not stop when I called Coach ?"

"'Oos I was hired. I couldn't take you."

"Did you take up a fare at Newgate ?"

"Newgate ?"

"Yes. Answer me directly. Were you fetched from the stand at Holborn Bridge to take up a person at Newgate ?"

"N—o ! Why you are out o' you mind. My fare comed out o' Gray's Inn, and my stand was opposite the old pump. Ask the gemman himself as is my fare. I knows what you is—you is highwaymen, and wants to rob a poor fellow. Watch, watch, watch !"

"Hold your row, will you, and drive up to the next lamp ? We want to speak to your fare."

"Werry good."

"Danger," said Duval to himself; "three men well mounted and well armed. I must be off. Oh, if I only had my horse now with me, I would desire nothing better than to give them a run ; but on foot they are just one too many for me."

As he spoke, and as the coachman drove very leisurely to the nearest lamp which was on the near side, Duval opened the door of the coach on the off side, and merely held it from flapping wide open by one hand, while with the other he had one of his pistols ready for immediate action.

"Here ye is," said the coachman as he drew up, so that although he was pretty close to the lamp, not much of the light of it could come into the coach. At the same moment, too, a watchman crossed the road from the other side of the way, calling out—

"What's the row ? I'll take you all into custody. Who was it called out watch ? Here I am."

The mounted man who had given his orders in so very peremptory a manner, now leant from his saddle to look into the coach, and when he saw Duval he said—

"All resistance is useless. You are a prisoner. If you stir hand or foot I will put a pistol through your brain. I am not a man to be trifled with."

"Very likely," said Claude. "For whom do you take me ?"

"For Claude Duval !"

"Then you ought to be more careful."

Bang went Duval's pistol, and the man fell over his horse's neck instantly exclaiming—

"He has killed me Help, help ! He has killed me !"

Duval had kept his hand still upon the handle of the opposite door of the coach, and the moment he had pulled the trigger of the pistol, he opened it and dashed out, upsetting the watchman in the mud and rolling over him. With an exertion Duval rose, and only waiting to deal the prostrate watchman one heavy kick, he darted over the road, and dashed down what is now Wells Street.

All this was done with such rapidity, that the horseman who was close to the horses' heads of the hackney coach, and another who was just behind it, hardly knew what had happened, except that a pistol shot had been fired by some one, before Duval had vanished from before their eyes like a phantom. Perhaps, too, there was some little fear mingling with their other feelings, when they saw their comrade fall.

"After him," cried one of them recovering from the momentary confusion into which he had been thrown. "Come on. He went this way. Shoot him down if you see him."

They both started off in the direction Duval had taken, and when the hackney coachman found himself alone, he placed his finger by the side of his nose, and in a low voice he said—

"Five pun for that ere job. Good! Off I goes, and not never a one on 'em knows my number, I'm sure."

With these words he turned round his horses, and in a few moments was going at an easy pace down Wardour Street, quite satisfied with his night's work.

Duval did not go far up Wells Street, but turning off to the left, he at a slashing pace made his way to the upper part of Oxford Street. Fortunately for him, the officers did not turn in that direction, but rode on stopping to ask every passenger they met if such a person as he, Duval, had been seen; but no one could give them any information, and they rode right out into the fields where the Regent's Park now stands, before they began to think that they might as well give up so fruitless a chase.

They then made the best of their way to Oxford Street, where they found about half-a-score of watchmen around the dead body of their comrade, who had received Duval's pistol shot in his head, and had only lived long enough to utter the few words that we have recorded, before he fell from his horse to the ground.

In the meantime, Duval pursued his route on foot at a good round pace towards the Old Hats Inn, which he reached as the Acton church clock struck the hour of five in the morning.

CHAPTER IX.

DUVAL MEETS WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE AT EAST ACTON.

If the young city gent, instead of making the best of his way to the Mansion, when Duval so unceremoniously ousted him from his curriole, had gone back to the Old Hats, he might have done him, Duval, a much greater amount of injury than he did, for he might have laid hands upon his horse.

As it was, however, we have seen that he did not adopt that course, but rather chose to make the attempt at the Mansion House, which, although it had certainly placed Duval in no small peril, we have seen, signally failed in making him a prisoner, or in killing him, either of which objects would have been not at all displeasing to those who call themselves the authorities.

"But still Duval knew that there had been time enough even since his

escape, to send up an express to the Old Hats to detain his horse, for he had, it will be recollectored, lost considerable time in Newgate. It was therefore with some slight amount of anxiety that he now approached the ancient Inn. All was profoundly quiet, and from that Duval drew a favourable omen, and he boldly rung the ostler's bell.

In a few minutes a voice from within called out to know who was there.

"My horse," said Duval. "I want my horse, and here's half a guinea waiting for you, if you bring him out quick."

"Oh, you are the gentleman who went away in the curriole?"

"Yes—I am he."

"Very good, sir. I will be with you directly."

"All's right," thought Duval. "Only let me get into the saddle, and I care for nothing. Ah, what clattering sound is that I hear upon the road? Surely I am not at this critical moment pursued? That would, indeed, be provoking. By all that is unlucky, yes, I feel assured of it; some half-dozen horsemen are on the road, and I don't exactly know anything more likely to get folks into a gallop, such as they are coming at, than a chance of catching me."

With this conviction on his mind, Duval hammered at the stable-gate, and called out in a loud voice—

"Quick, ostler, quick."

"Coming, sir."

"The stable-gate was opened, and the ostler appeared with Duval's horse, all ready for the road.

"Hilloa," he said, "are they friends of yours, sir, as is coming from town at such a slashing pace? My eye, aint they doing it!"

Duval did not waste his time by replying one word, but vaulting at once into his saddle he faced round on the road, with his front to his pursuers.

"That half-guinea, sir," said the ostler.

"There is a whole one.—Halt!"

That word "halt" was pronounced by Duval, with such a sudden and startling distinctness, that the horsemen, one and all, on the instant drew up.

Then one who seemed to be the leader of the party, cried out—

"Who says halt? Are you anybody in authority?"

"Of course," said Duval.

"Who are you, sir? We are officers, and after the notorious highwayman Claude Duval. Perhaps you are a magistrate, sir?"

"Oh, my eye!" said the ostler.

The officer who had last spoken, trotted up to the spot where Duval was standing mounted, and the moment he turned his eyes upon him, he turned pale with passion, as he said in a hoarse, excited tone—

"Confound your impudence! you are Claude Duval! But your race is run at last. Surrender, or I will have your life—you vagabond!"

"Keep off," said Duval, "if you are a wise man. I am not used to be called names, my friend."

You ain't, ain't you? We will soon see what you are used to. Come on, my men, here's our customer; come on, here's Duval, and we must have him dead or alive. Here he is on his horse; we are just in time. He is afraid to run away; we are sure of him now."

"Well," said Duval, "you are the greatest fool in your business I ever met with yet. Come on, my men."

Duval uttered these last words so ironically that the officer's rage very much increased; and but that he felt very sure indeed that any movement of that sort would be the signal probably for a pistol bullet in his brains, he would have made a dash at Duval, and tried to capture him alone.

The others here rode up, but they trotted back again about twenty paces

from Duval. That was quite a sufficient indication that they considered the service they were on to be one of no small danger, and Duval took advantage of their momentary hesitation to increase their too evident fears.

"Hark you," said Duval, "there are six of you altogether, and I think that you are in force enough to get the better of me; but in so doing, it strikes me forcibly that you will run some risks, and some of you I should not be at all surprised to find stretched in death upon the road. I feel that I am to take the lives of three of you, and if you think that my capture is worth the risk of which three it shall be, why you may set about it at your earliest convenience."

The officers looked very shy.

"What!" cried the chief of them, "do you mean to say that you shrink from seizing this fellow now that you are face to face with him?"

"Of course they do," said Olande. "They are wise enough to prefer enjoying life a little longer to even dying with the glory of having contributed their lives. ~~at~~ the death of Claude Duval; and you will do well to imitate them, for I warn you that the first among you who makes a hostile demonstration against me, will not live another minute. Now take your own course: I am not going to wait here while you consider whether you can screw up your courage or not."

Duval very slightly half turned his head, and the officer, who may be said from courtesy to have command of the party, immediately took a pistol from his pocket, and fired it at him.

"All's right," said Duval. "You will find it much more difficult to hit with a pistol bullet than it looks, my friend. It was not a bad shot, but what do you think of this?"

As he spoke he produced one of his pistols, but the officer with a cry of alarm got behind his men. They however were by no means anxious to act as a shield to him, and they dispersed right and left immediately, leaving him fully exposed to Duval's fire; but the slight tinge of anger which at the moment might have induced Duval to shoot him, had passed away, and he no longer thought it worth his while to take such a life. However, to his great alarm, Duval kept him covered with the pistol, until unable any longer to stand such a state of mortal apprehension, the officer fairly turned and galloped away.

This served quite as sufficient impulse to his men to follow his example, so that for the time being Duval got rid of them without firing a shot.

"This is a panic," he said to himself, "and won't last long. I must take advantage of it while it does remain."

With these words he gave the word to his horse, and off for the Old Hata he went at a speed which defied all pursuit. He thought it would be much better to get out of the high road as soon as possible, so observing to his right-hand a green lane, that in the early morning looked very rural and inviting, he at once turned down it, and went half a mile at a good pace without a pause.

The lane, even during that brief space, had taken several turns, principally to the right, so that Duval did not know very well where it led to, as he had never to his knowledge been in its intricacies before. Of course, it could not take him out of his way, as his way just then was any way that promised him temporary safety, until the ardour of the pursuit contingent upon his escape at the Mansion House had quite subsided; so he trotted up the lane.

It was quite a beautiful and charming thing to hear the wild birds twittering and singing in the luxuriant hedgerow; and as the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens, Duval felt all that charming influence which the cool pleasant vital morning air is sure to impart, and more particularly so to one who like him was a lover of nature.

"Well," he said, as he paused and listened to the song of the thrush, "I yet hope that the day will come when I may be able to retire from the din and bustle of this kind of life in which I am engaged, and far off in the quiet country, lead a life of ease and serenity. If they would only let me do it, I think that I would make an effort to get together a couple of thousand pounds or so, and go off at once to some midland country, and turn squire."

Duval himself, as he went on, could not help smiling at the conceit of his finding capital on the road in the character of a highwayman, and then becoming with it the great man of some village far away from the scene of all his exploits.

"I wonder," he said, "if I could really so settle down? I doubt it."

A dog suddenly bounded to his side, and then a lad came lounging along the lane.

"Hello, my boy," said Duval, "where does this lane lead to?"

"To East Acton, sir. It's only round them alder trees to the right there, sir."

"Thank you. Humph! East Acton," said Duval. "I must have come a tolerable round to get here; but it is a quiet enough village among the trees, and perhaps after all it will be no bad plan upon my part to pass the day there. I will look about me first though when I get fairly into the village."

He only walked his horse now that the boy had told him it was so very near at hand, and then he found that he had been correctly enough informed, for upon turning the alders, he found himself in the village; but a sight met Claude's eyes which induced him to come to an abrupt stand still.

In the centre of the main, and indeed only thoroughfare of the village was a man holding a couple of horses, and from the accoutrements of the steeds it was quite evident to the practised eye of Duval that they belonged to the New Mounted Police, which had during the last six months been organised as a body of men ready to take the road against any highwayman who might become too notorious in any district. It was from this small body of mounted police that the horse patrol eventually sprang, and which gave the first very severe blow to highway robberies.

It was now highly necessary that Claude should speedily find a hiding-place, and he resolved to retreat into a piece of thick woods he saw in the distance. Scarcely had he reached the lane leading to the forest when he heard loud shouts, and the tramp of the feet of men and horses. It seemed as though a multitude of people were not far from him. He clambered up the hedgerow, and grasping the branch of a dwarf oak tree for support, he shaded his eyes with his hands. He looked in the direction whence the noise came. To his surprise he saw forty or fifty country people, some armed with pitch-forks, some with flails, and with them about eight on horse-back, who seemed to be directing the others how to proceed. Springing down from the top of the hedgerow, he commenced the work of loading all his pistols and bestowed them handily about his person, and there he stood considering for a few moments what he should do.

While he so stood he heard the riot of the pursuit approaching him closer and closer; he could almost at times distinguish what the people said; and more than once, he was certain that he heard the word, "He is in the lane! Come on!"

"Is he in the lane?" said Duval as he glanced round him, and then, with amazing speed, he took to his heels, and ran until he came to a stile that seemed to lead into some sort of plantation or preserve. He thought that it would be safer to get into that woody retreat than to remain in the open lane; so, vaulting over the stile, he dived at once among the trees, and the thick underwood that was outstretched in every direction, no doubt, as a shelter for the game that was there preserved.

It was quite a relief to Duval to get into this thick, woody retreat, after the sharp run he had, and he plunged on, now and then, torn by briars ; but feeling a sense of security, as each moment took him further and further into the intricacies of the preserve. Twice he started a pheasant which flew up above his head with a whirr, and once a hare rushed almost past his very feet.

"I shall baffle them for a time," he muttered. "If they even find that I have taken such a place of retreat as this, they will find it difficult to attack me here ; and if they are disposed for a species of warfare in which I can use my pistols with advantage upon them they may have it, and then take the consequences."

There can be no doubt but that in the then embittered state of Duval's feelings he would not have scrupled at the taking of more life than he ordinary have liked to level his pistols at. His enemies were certainly nearer than they had been.

"Let them come," he said. Some at least of them come to death. If I have not the lives of half a dozen men in my hands, it will cease to be a matter of regret to me ; for I shall myself have gone from this world."

He saw close to him a large tree, and the thought occurred to him that if he once climbed it and hid among its branches, those who were pursuing him might possibly pass.

"Amid all these trees," he said, "although they may fancy I may be hidden in one, they cannot pitch upon which, and it will take them until sunset to climb into one half of them to see ; and as for firing at me in the tree, even if they take that mode of trying if I am here, the merest twig or folded leaf thicker than common will alter the direction of a bullet. Yea, the tree will be the thing ; and if it come to a fight, I think they will be more happy to get out of the range of my fire, than I out of that of theirs."

Active as Duval was, it did not take him many minutes to climb up into the tree ; but when there, he was rather surprised to find a smell of smoke pervading its branches, as if from recently burnt wood. He was just asking himself what this could be, when he heard voices close at hand, and peeping down from his leafy covert, he saw a man and a boy come cautiously near to the spot. The man was a large coarse-looking fellow, with a hideous squint, and the boy was one of those little wiry vagabonds only to be found in rural districts, and who are quite created by the game-laws. Both were dressed in a costume something between gamekeepers and poachers.

Duval set them down at once for the latter.

"What's all the row in the croft?" said the man, "eh, Peter? What's it all about?"

"Don't know," said the boy.

"You ought to know," cried the man, dealing him a box on the ears.

"Take that, and find out. You never know nought."

"Do that again," said the boy, "and I'll put my knife in thee."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the man. "Try, it Peter, try it, my boy. Only try it that's all."

"Then don't hit me."

"Only now and then, Peter, my boy, just to bring you up in a quiet way like. Now, what's the row in the croft?"

"They're hunting a highwayman."

"Oh, is that it. Hump, well I only wish they may not get him, the wretches. I hope he'll give 'em as many turns and doubles as an old fox."

The idea now of going a hunting a feller creetur, just, for saying stand and deliver, on the highway ; but there's nothing, Peter, but persecution in this here world. You daren't do nothing as is pleasant. If you knock a brace of partridges, or throttles a hare, they has you up, so we oughtn't to wonder at society, Peter."

"Shouldn't I like to cut old Squire Adams's throat," said Peter. "I'd like to do it with a blunt knife, with a lot o' notches in it, and keep him a squalling for half an hour, I would."

This, to the perception of the big man, was such a happy conceit, that he was compelled to hold his sides while he laughed; and then shaking his hand at Peter, he said—

"Ah my boy, you will be hanged, of course, but you'll do some funny things afore that comes to pass, I do think. We are best under ground though, while this hunt is going on. Let's get into the Old Cave, my boy."

CHAPTER X.

DUVAL GETS OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE.

Those words, Old Cave, rather struck upon the ear of Duval as being a little remarkable; but after a moment's consideration, he made up his mind that they referred to some public-house in the vicinity, for he well knew what odd, fanatic names were given at times to these establishments.

"Ah!" said Peter. "I does like the Old Cave."

"And so does I," said the man, "and if it wasn't for that, I don't think at times there would be a place for a poor fellow to hide his head in; and yet they call this a Christian country."

"They does—they does," said the boy.

Duval began to think that there was something more in the Old Cave story than he had at first supposed, for if it had merely referred to some public-house, it was natural enough that Peter and his not very respectable-looking friend would have gone off to it at once, instead of lingering upon the spot.

All Duval's doubts and cogitations upon the subject were however, soon at an end, for he saw enough in a very few minutes more to convince him that the words, Old Cave, for once must be taken in their literal sense, and by no means figuratively applied to any public-house.

The man after listening for a few moments, and apparently satisfying himself that no one was within hearing, said—

"Very good! It's all right, Peter. Now for it, old fellow, and if we dont fight a good fire and enjoy ourselves a little before the others come home, it won't be our faults."

"Not a bit of it," said Peter.

With this, the man went to an old broken down trunk of a tree that was near at hand, and having stooped over it, he pulled out a kind of a plug of wood, made from the roots of some other tree, and which evidently sufficiently stopped up the hollow trunk to give it only the appearance of incipient decay, if any one looked into it, while in reality it was no more than a mere shell.

"Now, Peter," he said, "you go down."

"Here you goes," said Peter.

The boy, with dexterity, swung himself up to the top of the old decayed trunk of the tree, and let himself right down, disappearing entirely from before the eyes of Duval.

"All right?" asked the man.

"Yes," said Peter. "All's right. Nobody at home, though."

Duval was a little curious to see how the man would get down, and replace-

the wooden plug in the tree, seeing that it was of rather a bulky appearance, and must have been weighty. But that was done with considerable tact.

He just balanced it at the side of the hollow trunk against the projecting branch that was sufficiently strong to hold it, and then having gone down the hollow, he put up one hand and pulled it slightly, when it fell into its place.

"Well," thought Duval, "that plan is worth the knowing, at any rate, if one should be hard pressed by the Philistines at any time, and certainly I should not feel any scruples in the world in making use of it, under such circumstances."

The cogitations of Duval concerning the old cavern, however, were soon put an end to by the appearance of his enemies in the immediate vicinity of the tree, in which he was hiding. Half-a-dozen well armed men came just under the tree, and one said—

"I feel quite sure that he is in the preserves somewhere."

"Well, said another, "if so, he is as good as taken, for it is not very large, and somebody is placed at every possible outlet, and within sight of each other too, to give the alarm."

"Then we shall starve him out!"

"Not a doubt of it; and in the meantime I shall amuse myself by going through the wood, and sending a good charge of shot through the trees, upon the chance of his hiding in some of them, for that's not the most unlikely thing in all the world."

"Far from it."

Duval set his teeth with anger, at the idea of being thus baited by a parcel of men whom he had not injured, and were such that it was not at all likely he would ever come in contact with them. The man who so kindly proposed to fire into the tree, was a kind of under game-keeper.

More men kept straggling in as the others spoke, and Duval had the satisfaction, if it were any, of hearing the most complete arrangements made for watching the preserve night and day, in order to entrap him, while there was a talk of getting more officers from London for the purpose of hunting him out of his place of concealment.

"This little wood," he thought, "will be too hot for me, probably, in a little while; but it will be bad for the healths of some of you, if you stop my progress from it."

Duval had not quite made up his mind what he should do, but as he did not feel any pangs of hunger or thirst, he felt that he could afford to wait in the tree a considerable time, and perhaps wear out the vigilance of his foes.

The man who had so coolly announced his intention of firing into the tree, was very deliberately now loading his double-barrelled fowling-piece, and when he had done so, he pointed it at a chestnut tree, some dozen yards from the one which Duval was hiding in, and fired.

"Have you caught him?" said one, as a few leaves and short branches came whirling to the ground.

"Never mind," said the man. "It was a scattering shot, and if he should chance to get one of them in his eye, he won't see his way so plain on the highway, if he should ever come to it again."

Duval had vehemently sought the hilt of one of his pistols, but he immediately relinquished the hold again, for he felt how imprudent it would be to shoot that man, although the temptation was very great and the provocation for doing so immense.

"Well," said the fellow, "I will take it for granted that he isn't in the chestnut."

"No," said another, "and for all I have heard of Duval, if you were to riddle him with shot, and he had made up his mind to stay in the tree, stay he would in spite of you."

" Yes, that he might, but I don't think he'd feel comfortable ; so here goes into the other tree."

The fellow now levelled his gun at the tree in which Duval was, and the only precaution that he, Duval, took was to cover his face with the lappet of his coat.

Bang ! went the second barrel of his gun, but as good fortune would have it, so far as Duval was concerned, not one of the shots touched him, although some half dozen of them lodged in a limb of the tree not twelve inches from his head.

" Hit him now, Sam ?" said one of the men.

" No, I don't suppose I have, and I didn't say I should ; but I could hit such a goose as you at three times the distance."

" Could you indeed, Sam. Why you are quite a wonderful character. Do you think Squire Adders will like to supply you with powder and shot to spoil the trees with, stupid ?"

" You mind your own business."

The man, who was named Sam, then walked sulkily off, reloading his gun as he went.

" Well, my fine fellow," thought Duval, " it certainly is possible that I may have to leave this preserve without paying you the little debt that I feel I owe you ; but I won't do so if I can help it, you may depend upon it. Sam, they call you. I won't forget that."

" Now my men," said a person suddenly arriving. " Any news of the person we are in search of ?"

" No sir ; Sam has gone blazing away into the trees, but we can't see any traces of him."

" Sam's an idiot."

" Well, sir, we did tell him not to do it, but he said he would, and now he's gone off to spoil all the fine old wood in the plantation, besides frightening the game out of their nests, and making, them clear out of the preserve, sir, for a month to come."

" Dear, dear, that any body should be so pestered with an idiot ! Which way did he go ?"

" Right on, sir, by those sycamores."

Upon this the person, who appeared to be in great authority, from the respect he was treated with by the others, went off at a quick pace after Sam, and Duval was not a little pleased at the idea that something like retributive justice might overtake the man, who because he had a gun in his hand, could not refrain from doing or attempting to do injury.

After this, the men left the vicinity of the tree in which Duval was hidden, and he had the satisfaction of knowing, that sentinels were placed all round the wood at such intervals, that they could see each other, and so spread a general alarm should he make any attempt to leave it.

Once again, and only once, Duval heard one of Sam's barrels go off, but after that all was still enough, as no doubt he had been stopped from carrying his project of firing into the trees any further. It therefore was become a very serious thing with Duval to consider what he should do in this emergency of his fortune.

If he should leave the tree, or attempt by a rush to get away, he felt that he would be only making his situation a great deal worse than it was, inasmuch as he was now under cover, whereas he would be at the mercy of his enemies, to be chased through the open country ; and without his horse, what could he do ?

" No," he said, " if I do anything it must be by finesse, under cover of the night ; but it is by no means a pleasant idea to sit in a tree till then."

It was rather a grave question, though, when he came to consider how he

could by any means better his condition ; and then, after a time, his thoughts reverted to the old cave. Scarcely had he turned his eyes in the direction of that singular place, when he heard a noise, and the plug of wood that filled up the strip of the aged tree, was raised from within, and the man made his appearance.

"Humph," he said. "It's all right. Peter, come on, my boy, come on."

It was evident that he was well accustomed to lodging the loose piece of aged root upon the projecting branch of the hollow trunk, for it was done in a moment ; and then he scrambled out, being followed by Peter, who was on the ground with the agility of a monkey in a moment.

"Come on, Peter, my boy," he said. "Let's go to the Mill Hill, and see what's doing. Who knows but there may be something for honest folks to pick up ?—such as a stray duck, or a hen, or even a shirt, or a pair of stockings hung on a hedge. Always keep your eyes open, Peter, and be industrious. Doesn't the copy books say that Satan always finds some work for idle hands to do ?"

"Hold your gammon," said Peter.

"Gammon ! Do you call that gammon ? Oh, Peter, I'm very much afraid as you don't mind your chatechiz, you bad boy. Come on, you whiper, will you, and mind you keep your eyes open, and is down upon everything like a shot, if you thinks it worth the taking."

"I hear you."

"Well, Peter, it is a good thing that you does. Take that."

"Oh, murder ! what do you kick me for ?"

"Why, Peter, you said you heard me, and I thought you might as well feel me too, you is such a forward nice boy ; so now come on, and whatever you do, Peter, always be civil to everybody as is bigger than yourself."

CHAPTER XI.

DUVAL FINDS A TEMPORARY REFUGE IN THE CAVE.

DUVAL, if his circumstances could have permitted him, would no doubt have enjoyed quite a hearty laugh at the peculiarities of Peter, and the man with whom he appeared to be very closely associated ; but the fact was, that Duval's whole attention was too much engaged in his own affairs just then to smile at the peculiarities of others.

When the man and Peter had got fairly away, and Duval could no longer hear their feet upon the decayed leaves of the preserve, he began to ask they himself whether or not it would be prudent to go himself into the cave that they had just left.

"What can they be," he thought, "but poachers ? and from the advice of the man to Peter, it appears that they are not very particular about what they do, so long as they are doing something. I might surely be safe enough with such people, and, besides, I can pay them well, which is rather an important element in the transaction."

There was now only one consideration that made Duval pause a little before venturing to the cave, and that arose from the expression of the man's to the effect, that there was nobody at home, which would lead to the supposition that others besides himself and the boy Peter were in the habit of visiting the cave, in which case there might be rather too many to trust himself and his liberty to.

If they had been members of what is called the "London family," that is to say, cracksmen or highwaymen by profession, Duval knew that he would have been safe enough, if a thousand pounds had been the immediate price of his death or capture; but with such personages as those who might use that cave—half-poachers, half-poultry stealers, and in fact, wholly anything that would soften the rigour of poverty in the country—he felt that he should hardly feel at ease.

After about ten minutes spent arguing the matter, pro and con, with himself, he at length said suddenly—

"I will chance it."

When Duval made a resolution he was not long carrying it out, and from the moment he said "I will chance it," he began to make preparations for the risk. Cautiously he descended from the tree, for although no one was at hand, he felt that it would be highly desirable to make as little noise as possible.

He trod lightly upon the ground, and reached the tree, or rather the old decayed stump of tree, which served as the portal of the cave, concerning which the man and Peter had spoken. To him it was not a matter of any difficulty to remove the plug of wood that stopped it up; and as he had tolerable tact, he quickly balanced it as he had seen the man do.

All below seemed to be as dark as night, and yet if they, Peter and his friend, had gone down in safety, there is no reason upon earth why he, Duval, should not.

While he paused for half a moment, he heard, or fancied he heard, a foot-step coming towards the place. That at once determined him, and drawing up his feet as he had seen the man do by the aid of a couple of branches of the old stump over head, he at once let them down into the cavity, and felt that he stood upon something. Then he pulled the plug of wood into its place, and narrowly escaped a severe blow upon the head with it as it came down.

The sensation that Duval felt now, was anything but an agreeable one. He was in a place that he could not move in, in any direction but downwards or upwards, and he was in total darkness. There was no hold for his hands either anywhere, so he was forced to trust to fate or providence.

Cautiously he put down one foot off the little kind of ledge that he stood upon, and then he felt another such a one below, at a distance of about six inches, and from that moment he felt quite easy as to the mode of descent, for that he was on the top stairs of a little flight of steps was sufficiently apparent.

He descended very carefully, for he was rather afraid of hitting his head, but after getting down no less a number than eighteen of the little steps, he found that they ceased, and then he stood upon ground and not upon wood, of which they were composed. Yet he was in the most profound darkness, and he felt all round him without being able to find any mode of outlet.

Under these circumstances he proceeded right on for about six steps, and then as he kept his hands stretched out before him, he felt something move to the touch.

At first he started back, for he thought that in the darkness he had touched some person, but it was only for a moment that such an idea took possession of him, and he immediately advanced, and found that what he had touched was a blanket, apparently hanging in the way of his further progress.

After a moment or two's consideration, Duval did not make any effort to tear the blanket down; but he moved his hand across it until he reached the edge of it, and then he drew it aside, and in a moment he saw where he was.

The blanket covered the entrance of the cave, which was about thirty feet in length, and nearly as many in breadth. The roof was rather low, but by

he light of a turf fire which was faintly burning in one corner, Duval was able to look pretty well about him, at the rather singular place in which he found himself.

The walls were evidently of nothing but hammered earth, and projecting from them in some places were the gnarled roots of old trees, which flourished in the little wood overhead. The floor was earth likewise, but hammered quite hard ; and from the state of the atmosphere, it was quite evident that there was some mode of ventilation, and some sort of chimney by which the smoke from the turf fire made its escape.

Of furniture, there was nothing in the place but a very rough wood table evidently put together with no skill, and some stools apparently got up by the same hand. An old chair was in one corner, and upon some shelves fastened by some screws to the walls, there were many little odd articles, and a quantity of cooked and some uncooked meat, as well as some bread.

A large pitcher was in one corner with a piece of thick board over it, and upon peeping in, Duval found that it contained ale of some kind, by the odour.

" Well," said Duval, " one might live here a little while in preference to a jail above ground. It is rather dark, though."

Upon one of these shelves he found a candle in a little square lamp of clay by way of a candlestick, and he speedily ignited it at the turf fire, which spread an agreeable enough warmth in the atmosphere of the place ; but what most surprised him was that he could perceive no dampness in the cave.

From this latter circumstance he came to the conclusion that it was very old indeed ; and that from the constant presence of the turf fire, which was never permitted to go out, it had got in time so warmed, and the walls and floors so baked, that the damp vapours of the earth could not penetrate into the place.

" Very good," said Duval, " I am here certainly an uninvited guest, but I will make myself as welcome as I can for all that. If anybody comes they will perhaps be pleased to recollect that if they have the secret of my being here, that I have the secret of this place, so that we shall be even."

With this, Duval placed upon the rough table some of the cooked meat, and pouring himself out a portion of the ale in a brown jug that he found, he sat down, and was quite determined to enjoy himself as well as he could.

In the midst of all this though, Duval was not unmindful of his safety, for he looked carefully to his pistols, and ascertained that they were in excellent order, and he kept his ears open to the lightest sound that might warn him of the approach of any one.

Half an hour thus passed away, and Duval had, by an ample meal from the flesh of some venison and a ham, fortified himself against the pangs of hunger at all events for the rest of the day ; and as he had considerably rested himself, he rose, and taking the candle in his hand, he determined to make what discoveries he could in the cavern.

At first sight it would seem that there was in that place nothing to see but what you might take in at a glance ; but Duval soon found that such was not the case. He found in one corner another odd dingy blanket hanging up, which by the action of time, and the smoke and heat, had got so much the colour of the wall, that until you got quite close to it, it would be impossible to distinguish the one from the other.

" Oh," said Duval, " my obscure friends of the cave have got an inner apartment, which I will take the liberty of examining."

With the candle in his left hand, he, with the right, moved the old blanket aside, and found that upon the other side of it there was a cave about half the size of the outer one, and in this inner cavern it was quite evident that

DEATH TO THE TRAITOR ; OR,

people were in the habit of sleeping, for the floor was covered in many places with old clothing and rushes, and such other substitutes for beds or mattresses as the neighbourhood might afford to those who were not very particular.

It was while Duval was looking round him at this inner cave, that he thought he heard a slight noise over head, and after listening attentively, he was convinced that a footstep passed over the roof of that part of the cavern.

"Some one comes," he said "I will take my seat by the fire and take the affair easy. The more confidence I show that I feel myself, the more I shall make those feel who may call this place there home."

With this view, Duval sat down by the turf fire again, and kept his eyes fixed upon the blanket that stopped up the entrance to the cavern. Each moment he felt more and more convinced that some one was coming, and he could see that the blanket was slightly agitated by a current of cold air that came from the preserve above.

Another moment and Duval could hear the lump of wood pulled back into the hollow of the tree, and then a footstep came down the little narrow stairs. The blanket was pulled aside and a man came into the cavern

"Good day, my friend," cried Duval.

At the moment, the man was so terrified that he stood as though he had been turned to stone. Then, with a shout of dismay, during which the words—"I didn't do it!" came from his lips, he turned and tried to escape from the place, but that was just the thing that Duval did not mean that he should do.

Springing from the old chair by the corner near to the fire, Duval caught him by the neck and dragged him back into the cave again, for he had got to the foot of the little flight of stairs.

"Oh, no—no," he cried, "it wasn't me. Murder ! murder ! They did it among 'em, they did, and buried the body under Smythe's bed. Oh, I didn't do it, and they wouldn't give me my share. Oh, good sir, let me go, do—do dear, oh dear!"

"Don't be a fool," said Duval.

"No, sir. Oh dear, sir, no. Would you like a nice young hare, sir ?"

With this, from under his smock-frock the man produced a leveret that was quite warm, it having been only recently secured in the preserve above the cavern.

"Anything, sir, you like, only dont have me up about it. I'm as innocent as a lamb, sir, indeed I am, and you see I'm quite a boy."

CHAPTER XII.

DUVAL GIVES A LESSON.

DUVAL found it quite in vain to attempt to say any thing while the fears of this man overcame him in such a way, but he took care to keep between him and the opening of the cavern, so that he should not have the opportunity of making another bolt to escape him. Duval could see, that notwithstanding he was a long hulking sort of fellow, he was very young, and he calmly waited until he had said all that his fears dictated.

"Have you done ?" said Duval, when from sheer want of breath the other paused.

"Oh dear, yes sir. Anything you like."

"Very well. Listen to me then, and in the first place you must know that I am not only well armed, but that I am accustomed to defend myself, so any attempt at mischief on your part will in all likelihood fall on yourself. Do you understand me ?"

"Oh, dear yes, sir."

"Very good. Now who are you ?"

"Why, sir, you'd hardly believe it ; but they want to make out that I am a poacher."

"Indeed. Well how many of you belong to this cavern, or know of it, and make a practice of coming to it ?"

"There's six of us, sir, besides Peter ; but Peter is only a boy you see, sir, and I don't count him."

"Very well. Now I will calm your fears by telling you I am a highway-

man, and that I came to this place only to save myself from those who chased me into the wood."

"Why—then you are Claude Duval!"

"I am."

"Oh lor! What a treat. Oh, dear. I heard 'em all on the road looking for you. Oh, how comfortable I feel, to be sure. I thought you were some officer from London, and that you had no end of others, all ready to pounce upon a fellow, I feel quite another thing now. My name, do you know, is Luke. They call me lanky Luke, but Luke without the lanky is my name."

"Am I welcome here?"

"To be sure. Yes—Oh, of course you are. They won't find you in this out-of-the-way place. You are as welcome as flowers in May, and yet—yet—now I think—

"What do you think?"

"Ned is a thorough bad one, and so is Bill, and they lead the others. No, you had not better stay here, Duval. There are some of the fellows, and Peter the boy too, that you mustn't trust to. Be off with you before they come. I know 'em, I know 'em."

There was such an air of pitiful sincerity about the manner in which Luke uttered these words, that Duval felt it was far beyond the reach of art, and he believed him implicitly.

"I am much obliged to you, Luke," he said, "for your friendly caution, but my danger in the wood while daylight lasts is so great that I feel myself compelled to risk something here, and to try to make some terms with your companions. I can pay them well."

"There's something in that," said Luke.

"When do you expect them?"

"They come at any time, or not at all to-day for all I know. But now I am here I'll stay if you make up your mind to do so, and I'll say all I can to make things pleasant. How came you to know of our old cavern, though? We thought we had the secret all to ourselves."

"It was a mere accident made me acquainted with it, Luke, which it would be no use imparting to you. I will pay liberally for shelter until dark, and then I will leave, and the secret shall remain with me as safely as if you had it only in your own bosoms."

"Hush!" said the poacher, and he put his hand up to his ear in an attitude of listening.

"What do you hear?"

"Some of the lot coming. They may take your being here amiss, or they may not. It's just as it happens. But mind you, I will be your friend; and if anything really goes amiss, I'll let you know."

"Thank you," said Duval, as he held out his hand to Luke, who gave it a friendly pressure. "Thank you; it is a strange thing that, in the worst extremity of my fortunes, I never failed to pick up a friend; and it is equally true as strange, that that friend never repented of holding out the hand of kindness to me."

"All's right," said Luke.

Duval could now plainly hear the sound of footsteps approaching down the nearly perpendicular stairs, and in the course of half a minute the blanket was drawn aside, and two men, of about as repulsive aspects as could very well be imagined, made their appearance in the cavern.

It happened that the first person that they cast their eyes upon was their companion, Luke, and they did not see Duval, who was close to the turf fire and rather in the shade. If they did observe the figure of a man, they, of course, concluded it was one of their own comrades. One of them said—

"There's no end of row in the preserve. They say that Duval, the high wayman, is there, and they are determined to have him out somehow."

"He was there," said Duval, stepping forward, "but he is here now."

The two men started back, and one of them pulled from under his smock frock the barrel and butt of a gun, so made, that they could be secured together at any time, and commenced fitting the pieces, while the others got far off in the cavern, and after a moment or two, owing to the surprise of the sudden sight of a stranger, he cried,—

"What's all this? Are we sold at last? Keep off, will you!"

"We ain't quite done yet, Ned," said the other, "while I have got my little single barrel here."

"I don't know," said Duval, "what you are both putting yourselves out of the way for. My name is Claude Duval; and I found out your cave by mere accident; and being hard pressed by my enemies, in the preserve above, I came to it as a temporary refuge. What you can have to say against that, or how it will serve you to make a riot with me, I don't know!"

"But how are we to know who you are?"

"Stand out of the way!" said the man with the gun. "Stand out of the way! Ned, and I'll put an end to the matter, by shooting him at once. That will be the best plan of all. Stand out of the way!"

"Hark ye," said Duval; "if you don't this minute put down that gun, I will make you."

"You make me?"

The last three words were scarcely out of the fellow's mouth, when Duval made such a dash at him, that not having his fingers actually upon the trigger, he could not discharge the piece as he had fully intended to do. Duval wrested it from his hands, and turning it round, dealt him such a blow upon the head with the butt-end of it, that down he went insensible; and the gun broke in two where the screws were that fastened the butt end of it onto the barrel.

"Take that," said Duval. "If you think that I am going to stand here, and let an idiot like you present a gun at me, you are very much mistaken, indeed. Now, Mr. Ned—if that's your name—I have had no quarrel with you. You are poachers, and perhaps something else and worse. I am a highwayman. What in the name of all that is ridiculous should set us by the ears together?"

"I don't know," said the fellow. "I don't want to quarrel with anybody, not I; only Luke had no business to bring a stranger into the old cave."

"No," said Luke, "nor did I."

"That is true," said Duval. "I can tell you, Mr. Ned, that Luke, far from bringing me here, found me here and was as much surprised as you can be. I found out your cave by an accident; and to save your comrade Luke, here, from any suspicion of having brought me, here, I will tell you how I found it out... I was hiding in a tree not far from here, and saw a man and a boy open the trap. The boy was called Peter."

"It must be so," muttered Ned.

"It is so."

"Well, well, Claude Duval, we don't wish to do the thing that's unhand-some. We are poachers, and if the secret of our cave is known, we may as well go and give ourselves up and get transported at once, for our living has gone likewise. If you keep our secret, and be off soon, there's no harm done except to George's head, which you needn't have gave such a crack to."

"There I differ from you, friend. It was quite evident from George's conduct, that his head was very hard; and I felt, therefore, that it required a very good crack to produce any effect upon 't; so in that way he haas got 'n

more than he deserves, you see. I will keep the secret of your cave to my dying day, and beyond that if you wish it; so don't be putting yourself and your comrades out of the way on that score. Deal fairly with me, and I go at dark; but I tell you that I am not afraid of you nor all who may come here, and that I will make such a racket about your heads if you play any pranks with me, as shall make you remember to-day as long as you live. I don't say that as a threat, but as a warning."

"Oh, well, well, there's no occasion," said Ned, who was evidently cowed, as all bullies are, by the manner of Duval. "There's no occasion to make any disturbance. It's all right now. The others will drop in soon, and then you can make yourself quite comfortable, you know."

"I intend," said Duval; "and if I mistake not, some of them are coming now."

Duval was right, for in the course of a moment or two, Peter and the man with whom he seemed to have so close an alliance, offensive and defensive, made their appearance; accompanied by a coarse, brutal-looking man, with violently red hair. At the sight of Duval, there was a general consternation; but Ned took upon himself to explain, and to smooth over every fear and indignation which the others felt; although to Duval's apprehension his manner of doing so was anything but pleasant, as to him, it just translated itself into—'Don't say anything just now, as it may be dangerous, but wait a little until I give you a hint to speak, and then we will do something.'

In the course of five minutes more another man made his appearance, and to Duval he was the most repulsive looking of the whole lot. He was short and thick set, having a kind of roll in his walk, as though very unsteady on his feet. His features were thick and coarse, and his head was of that shape and make, commonly denominated a bullet-head. His hair was nearly black, and he had the peculiarity of never looking any one in the face. From the physiognomical expression of this man, it was evident that obstinacy was his prevailing characteristic, and that he was one of the most wrong-headed brutes that even the Almighty permitted to exist.

By some means this man evidently was looked upon by the others as a sort of leader, and his opinion was eagerly listened to.

CHAPTER XIII.

DUVAL'S STRUGGLE WITH THE POACHER CAPTAIN.

In a clamouring sort of way it was explained to this new comer who and what Duval was, and he regarded him in silence for some few moments beneath his knitted brows.

"How now!" he at length cried. "Are we to be turned out of house and home by highwaymen? Eh! Eh!"

Duval made him no answer.

"What do you mean by this?" he cried. "Are you dumb?"

"He's rather a dangerous fellow," said one of the men. "Don't go near him, captain. There's no knowing what he may do all of a minute."

"Oh, ain't there, indeed?"

With this the fellow waddled up to Duval, for all he could accomplish in the way of walking was something in the shape of a waddle; and setting his arms akimbo, he cried—

"Look, Mister Knight of the Road. We don't let lodgings, here, and I should advise you in a friendly way to take yourself off about as quickly as you conveniently can. Do you hear?"

"I hear," said Duval.

"Well, and hearing, do you understand?"

"Perfectly; but I don't intend to go."

"You don't intend to go? Come, that's a good one. I'll soon see whether you intend to go or not. Oh, I am used to such customers as you are, as my friends here know well enough. Are you a bruiser or a wrestler? Speak the truth."

"A little of both."

"Oh, you are—are you? Then here goes for a tumble. Don't you interfere, my lads. These long slabs of fellows are easily upset, and you'll soon see how he will lower his tone after taking the measure of our floor on his back. Now old chap, just look to yourself, for I am not at all particular, when I get a chap in a hug, where I pitch him to."

"Then I must not be particular, I suppose?"

"Not a bit."

The man upon this made a rush at Duval, and caught him round the loins but notwithstanding the heave he made, and which brought up almost all the blood in his body to his face, he could not move him, and then he was forced to let his pent-up breath go. This was just the moment that Duval was waiting for, and taking instant advantage of it he fairly lifted the ruffian off his feet, and gave him a tremendous fall into a far corner of the cavern.

"Will that do?" he said.

The fellow lay without breath or motion.

"You have killed him," said one of the others.

"Not at all, said Duval, "such a fall as that may break a bone perhaps, but it don't kill. Throw a pailful of water over him if you have got one, but you will soon find him get up again."

"Murder!" said the discomfited fellow, in a low voice.

"There, you see," said Duval, "I told you so."

Two of the others now helped the captain, as they called him, to his feet. His face was of an ashy paleness, and he shook so that he could scarcely manage to stand at all. After a great effort, however, he managed to put on a sickly kind of grin, and holding out his hand to Duval, he said—

"Well, old fellow, you wrestle well—very well. I don't mind a few falls. Come, we will make merry now."

"As you please," said Duval. "All I can say is, that I came here for shelter, and I have met with nothing but attempted violence, since I have been in the place, from one and another of you. I promised to keep your secret, as indeed, why should I not? for what earthly good could it do me to do otherwise? and ye yet have made repeated attempts against my life."

"Oh, well, we understand each other now, old friend. Let beggars be beggars. The past need not trouble us now; come, we will be merry. Get out some of the old wine, comrades."

"What, have you wine here?" said Duval.

"Oh yes. The fact is, a great lord's mansion in this neighborhood is shut up, while he is somewhere abroad, and there's a good cellar of wine that we have found the way into, and on drizzling dark nights, when it's difficult to see your hand before your face, we bring away a few dozen. By the time he comes back, he will have an empty cellar."

Duval looked at his watch, and then he said—

"It wants yet some time to the period when I shall make an attempt to leave this place, so I will take a glass with you, at all events. At dusk I will try to get away."

"That you will easily manage. There is no moon to-night, and the trees in the old preserve cast such shadows, that as long as you make no noise, you may get along famously. Come, master, let us enjoy ourselves while we can; life's short, you know."

As the fellow said these last words, he winked at the man who had been first seen by Duval with the boy, and that worthy burst into a great laugh. This wink and the laugh that followed it, set Duval thinking what it could possibly mean, and from that moment he became all but certain that there was some plot on the alert as regarded him.

"I will watch these rascals narrowly," he said, "and woe be to them if they try to play me any trick. They may succeed, since they are so many to one, in killing me, but they shall find I am not very easily overcome."

There was now a general kind of a bustle in getting more lights, during which the man named Luke contrived to pass Duval and slightly pinch his arm to attract his attention; and then he said in a whisper the one word, "Poison."

Duval did not by any imprudent start or exclamation betray that a communication of such a character had been made to him. He heard it as though he heard it not; only by a slight touch of Luke's foot with his own he managed to let him know that he was fully cognizant of the friendly warning.

It certainly had not entered into the imagination of Duval to conceive that even these men could be such desperate villains as to try to take his life by poison; but yet he could not for a moment doubt the truth of the communication that was made to him by Luke, and of course he determined to be upon his guard.

And now they cleared the table in the middle of the cave, and began to place glasses upon it, and the captain cried out in a loud, boisterous kind of voice—

"My shoulder ain't quite so supple as it was, but we will make merry for all that, and live till we die. It ain't always the strongest that live the longest, is it, Mr. Duval?"

"Certainly not."

"Ha! ha! You never uttered a truer word than that in all your life. Now comrades, quick, and get all ready. Who knows how many of us may be alive and kicking by cock-a-row?"

"Life is proverbially an uncertain possession, I admit," said Duval, "and therefore I am a great advocate for enjoying it while we can."

"And so am I, so am I. I will just pop into the cellar and get the wine, and then we shall be all right."

With these words the fellow went into the inner cavern, and after being absent for about five minutes, he returned with two wine bottles in his hand, and placing them down at the top of the table, but carefully putting his hand upon one of them, he said—

"We don't want more than one light; surely we can see the way to our mouths. One light will be plenty; there is no knowing what little odd device the light might get through, and give the alarm against us if we had too much of it in the old cave. There, that will do."

Two lights had been lit, but now one of them was extinguished, so that quite a semi-darkness reigned in the old cave, and even the ferocious countenance of the man who called himself the captain of the gang, was but dimly visible; but yet his eyes evidently had about them a fiendish, malicious twinkle, which more and more had the effect of convincing Duval that Luke was right in the warning that he had given to him.

"Come now, sit down, old fellow; all's right," cried the captain. "The brave and honourable guest that we have here, will take his own bottle all

to himself, you see, while we drink together. It looks more like as if we thought something of him, you see; and so we do, and I hope we shall have him with us a long time, that I do."

"Thank you," said Duval. "I am, then, to drink by myself?"

"If you please, and then you can fill as often as you like, you know, without at all waiting for us."

"Oh, thank you; that will do."

The candle was just about half arm's-length from Duval, as he sat by the captain, and that latter personage, since he had taken his seat, no longer kept his hand upon the bottle that he intended for himself and his comrades.

"Come, now," he said, "we waste time."

"Yes," said Duval, placing his right hand on the bottle intended for him. "We do. But I hope to be better acquainted with all of you, my friends!"

As he said these words, he waved his left arm, so as to give emphasis to the words, "all of you;" and at once upset the candle, and rolled it on the floor, when it went out. A nearly complete state of darkness ensued, for the turf fire, was at its lowest ebb now, and taking advantage of the moment, Duval *changed the bottles*, taking the captain's one for himself, and placing his by the captain's hand.

"Holloa," said that personage, "All's right; light up again. Light up. That will do. We have no stint of matches. There's no harm done."

"I really," said Duval, "must apologise."

"Not at all—not at all. There's no occasion. Accidents will of course happen at times to the best of us."

The candle was speedily enough lighted, and when it was placed upon the table again, they found Duval's right hand still clasped round the neck of the bottle, as it had been before the upset, and they little suspected that it was not *the* bottle that he had had his hand on before.

The captain glanced at him, and was satisfied. He laughed, as he said—

"Upon my life, you are a great orator, Mister Duval, for you suit the action to the word, you do, and away goes the candle. But it's of no consequence; all I say is, drink."

"With pleasure," said Duval, as he poured out a glass of the wine.

"Now, my lads," said the captain, "now, my lads, push me your glasses, and I'll fill them. All's right, you know! All's right! We shall yet live many a long day, I hope, ay, and a night, too, in our old cave, that has sheltered us so long."

"Not a doubt of it," said Duval.

The glasses were all filled, and while the captain was busy doing so, Duval caught the eye of Luke and shook his head. Luke slightly nodded and Duval then felt certain that he fully understood him, and would not drink the wine.

"Bumper! bumper! all," said the captain, as he raised his glass. "Now, Mister Duval, when we take a glass in this sort of enjoying way, the first thing we drink to is the old cave."

"Very good."

"So, my boys! I give you the toast of 'The Old Cave!' and Mister Duval will drink it, I know, in a bumper at once, and leave nothing in the glass. 'The old cave! The old cave!' Are you all ready?"

"Yes, yes! All ready, captain!"

"Then here goes,, and much good may it do us."

"Amen!" said Duval, as he drank his glass of wine clean out, while the captain and his beautiful companions did the same, with the exception of Luke, who cleanly enough tossed his glass of wine over his shoulder, and then put down the empty glass as though he had drunk it.

When this was done, and the captain saw that Duval's glass was quite empty—indeed he had watched him drink it that there should be no mistake about it—he leant back almost to the verge of falling, and laughed cunningly.

"I wish you would let me know the joke," said Duval.

"Oh, it's nothing—it's nothing. Take another glass, that's all. I like to see you enjoying yourself. Don't we, comrades?"

"Oh dear yes," they all said.

"I, of course, will take another glass," said Duval. "But you must all fill, and this time I will give you a toast."

"Hurrah! All's right! Put your glasses this way, comrades. We will all fill, of course. Glass for glass. And now let us have the toast of Mister Duval. How do you feel, Mister?"

"Quite charming," said Duval. "Quite charming."

CHAPTER XIV

DUVAL REACHES THE HIGHWAY AGAIN.

At this reply of Duval's regarding his feelings, the captain roared again with laughing; indeed, his conduct was so indiscreet, that more than one of the rascals winked at him to be cautious. He was a little more quiet accordingly.

"All's right," he said. "All's right as possible. Silence for Mister Duval's toast. Here we are with our glasses quite full. By-the-by, Mister Duval, how do you like this wine?"

"Very well, indeed."

"You like its flavour?"

"I do. I flatter myself I am a pretty good judge of Port wine, and this appears to me to be particularly pure and good. I feel tolerably convinced that there is nothing in it."

"Oh!—oh! That's good. Oh! oh!"

The captain got into such a convulsion of laughter that he nearly fell off his stool, but Duval did not make any remark about his conduct, and as the others called loudly now for the toast, Duval rose to propose it.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the toast I have to propose is one that is common as an expression in society at large. I don't pretend that it has any over-particular application to the present company, except so far as we are all a little adverse to the laws, and therefore may be able to fully appreciate the sentiment: Are you all ready, gentlemen?"

"All—all."

"Then I give you 'The cunning fox that outwitted himself!'"

The glasses were all emptied, including Duval's, with the exception of Luke's, and he got rid of his wine as before.

The fellows looked at each other a little uneasily, for they did not at all like the complexion of the toast, and the captain for a moment or two turned serious, but he soon rallied, and then he said—

"Pray Mister Duval, what is the explanation of that?"

"There is no explanation at all. Only it is as well I think to drink to the cunning fox who outwitted himself, because there is really no knowing what may happen to him in consequence."

"Well, you are a strange fellow."

Allow me to return the compliment."

"Come—come, we won't quarrel about nothing."

"I never was farther from any desire to quarrel than now," said Duval. "I must confess that I am perfectly satisfied, and your wine is excellent, let it have come from whose cellar it may. I don't think a whole bottle of this would do a fellow any harm."

" You don't?"

" Certainly not. Why should it?"

" Oh, there is no reason at all why it should. How do you feel now? Pretty well—eh? You don't feel at all queer, do you?"

" Not in the least."

" But I do, captain," said a mournful voice from the lower end of the table. " I do, I can tell you. Oh, what have you been about, you stupid fool? I don't feel all right at all."

" Why, what's the matter with you?"

" That's just what I should like to know. I—I shall go down in a minute or two. I know I shall. Oh dear—oh dear!"

" Good gracious," said the captain, " what is the meaning of it? Mister Duval, ain't you ill? Don't you feel queer? Tell me only that you feel queer rather, and it will be such a satisfaction. You must, you do feel queer!"

" Not at all."

" Then—I—do."

" Well," said Duval, quite calmly. " I thought you did not look the thing exactly, my worthy friend, several times during the last few minutes; but you ought to know best, of course. I hope there was nothing wrong in your wine?"

" Wrong—wrong! what do you mean? Oh—oh. The old cavern is beginning to go round with me."

At this moment, two of the gang fell from their stools to the floor of the cavern, where they lay perfectly insensible, and Duval, seizing the captain by the arms, bawled in his ear—

" Here's to the fox that outwitted himself. Ha! ha! my friend. Life is short. *I changed the bottles!*"

The captain upon hearing this fell backwards, stool and all, and Duval rose to his feet saying—

" I cannot say what abominable drug was put in the wine that it was intended I should drink. You know best yourselves, and you must take the consequences of it; and whatever they may be, you will recollect that I have nothing to do with them. I hate poison, and poisoners. There cannot be, in all the catalogue of crimes for which the worst of the human race have been famous, any one that can for enormity come near to poisoning. I now leave you to take the consequences of your own acts."

Not one of the villains was in a condition to answer him; and then, by a slight glance at his watch, Duval saw that the right time must have arrived, and he prepared to quit the cave. It was then that Luke stepped up to him, saying, in a voice that was struggling with emotion—

" Duval, after what has happened here to-night, this is no place for me. Will you let me go with you?"

" Certainly I will with pleasure."

" And you will trust me?"

" Most assuredly. You have already done me too great a service for me to dream for a moment that you would play me false now. Come with me, for I can very well imagine that these rascals were never fit companions for you, and probably after this night they might guess that you had some hand in the business, if they live over this affair, which they know best about."

" Oh yes," said Luke, " they will live, but they did not at all intend that you should. The poison is only, after all, a very powerful sleeping draught, and while you were under the influence of it they would no doubt have given you up to the officers or murdered you. They will not awake for a couple of days, I dare say, then they will feel, as the captain himself was so anxious you should feel, rather queer."

" Come then, Luke. Let us leave this place at once. It is no fit one for

either you or I. I do not desire any further revenge upon these rascals than I have had. Let them lie like drunken swine where they are, until they recover in the ordinary course. We will leave them."

"Oh dear, won't you take me?" said a voice.

Duval turned and saw the boy. He shook his head at him as he said—

"No, you are by far too amiable a youth for me to have anything to do with It's a good thing for you that they were not liberal enough to give you a glass of wine, so you can stay and nurse all your friends here, who may be in need of your assistance."

"Go to the dence," said the boy.

Duval took no further notice of him, but proceeded at once with the assistance of Luke to leave the old cave, and in the course of a very few minutes they were in the open air. It was indeed, to Duval, a most exquisite relief to be able to breathe once again the cool, pure fresh air, and for some minutes he could do nothing but stand still and inhale it with rapture as it came sighing and faintly whistling amid the old trees.

"This is pleasant," said Luke, "after being so long in the cave."

"It is delightful. I only wonder how those late friends of yours could bring their minds to pass much of their time in such a place. I would rather, ten times, lay my head in the open wood upon a few decayed leaves than I would sleep upon a bed of down in such a place as that we have just left."

"It is not very inviting, but I hope never to see it again; and I daresay you don't want particularly to do so!"

"Far from it, Luke; I am full as sick of it as you can be. It is a pity that there should be such a place and in such hands; but as it really has afforded me a shelter for a few hours, I will not betray the secret entrance. How shall we get clear of the wood? Probably, Luke, you know more of it than I do?"

"Oh yes, I know every nook and corner of it, and every tree. There will be no difficulty in our leaving it."

"Think you not? Are you aware that it is well guarded at every outlet upon my account, and there are sentinels placed all round it within hail of each other on purpose to intercept me, if I should make an attempt to leave it? for they are pretty sure that I am in it somewhere."

"Oh yes, I know all that; but if you will follow me, Duval, and trust to me I will take you quite clear of it easily."

"Lead on then."

Upon this, the first thing that Luke did, was to lie flat upon the ground for a few moments and listen intently. Then as he rose, he said—

"Do you mind wet feet?"

"Not particularly, if there's any good to be got by wetting them."

"The good will be the escape from the wood."

"All's right then, I don't mind wet feet at all, so lead on. If that is the only harm I shall come to in getting out of this place, which they think will prove such a trap for me, I think little of it."

"Don't speak then, except in a whisper, and come as close after me as you possibly can. In a little while we will leave this place behind us."

Duval could not at all conceive how it was that he was to escape from the wood, but he placed the most implicit confidence in his new friend and followed him closely. And now, even in the darkness, which was tolerably intense, it was quite a wonderful thing to see with what tact Luke made his way through the wood. He never for one moment appeared to be at a loss, or deviated to the right or to the left of his even course with any appearance of hesitation. On he went until suddenly pausing, he laid his hand upon Duval's arm, and whispered—

"There is one of the sentinels."

Duval was for a moment a little startled at this intelligence; but looking forward in the darkness, he saw the dim outline and the figure of a man with his arms across his breast leaning against a tree.

"That's the fellow," said Luke, "that went about the wood with a double barreled gun, firing into the trees."

"Is it?"

"Yes. He is well known as a brutal fellow."

"Then, my friend Luke, do you know it will be a very severe trial to me to be forced to leave this place without punishing him in some sort of way for his brutality."

"It will be hazardous."

"Never mind that. Will it seriously jeopardise our escape? for if so, I will give up the idea; but if it will not, I must confess it will give me great pleasure to be even with him, and pay him the debt I owe him, which else will accumulate with interest in my imagination."

"It may be done. You do not want to kill him?"

"Oh, no—no."

"Well, immediately in front of him there is a deep stagnant ditch, full of duckweed, and anything but in a savoury condition. Now I may as well tell you that the course by which we were and are to escape, is under a little bridge of some length, that will take us clear of the wood, and beneath which there is a running stream. No one will think that you have a sufficient knowledge of the place to venture under there in the dark, as it looks bad, and you will not be able to stand upright there."

"Is it close at hand?"

"Quite; half-a-dozen steps to the right here would take us to it now; so what you are going to do, do quickly."

"I will only send him into the ditch."

Duval with this crept gently forward until he got quite behind the tree against which the man was leaning, and then he doubled his fist, and suddenly dashing out he knocked him down; but scarcely had he touched the ground, when Duval stooped over him, and lifting him up bodily, threw him right into the centre of the ditch, with a loud splash.

Of course this was quite enough to spread an alarm among those who were placed to watch the outskirts of the wood, and the consequence was, that they began calling to each other. Luke seized the arm of Duval and said to him—

"Come, come, quick."

"It's done," said Duval, "I am ready."

They heard the man splashing about in the ditch as they rapidly left the spot, and then Luke led the way into the little stream. The passage under the bridge looked rather frightful. Indeed it was quite a matter of courtesy to call it a bridge at all, for it looked much more like a drain than anything else; but Duval followed his guide, and in about two minutes they both freely emerged from it, never at any time having been above their knees in the water.

"We are safe now," said Luke. "Here is the high road."

CHAPTER XV.

DUVAL ARRIVES AT HOME.

By a scramble up a rather steep bank, they both reached the high-road in safety.

"I owe you much," said Duval.

"No—no, not at all. But let us push on, and get out of this neighborhood as quickly as we can. Don't you hear the fellows calling to one another to keep a good look out?"

"I do."

"Well they will soon be running about everywhere. What direction would you like to go in? for I know all the roads well enough, and can easily take you by any one you like."

"I want to go to the village of Hornsey; but it is a good distance from here of course."

"Yes; but the London road will take us, and then we shall have to turn off to the left and get round Highgate, which will be rather a long stretch; but that won't matter. I only wish we had a couple of good horses; we would soon do it."

"Ah, my friend," said Duval, "this morning I had as good a steed as ever man bestrode; but the rascals killed her."

"So I heard. Let me think——"

"Of what?"

"Why, of how to get steeds. There's a good horse or two in the stables of the rector of this parish."

"You are not very particular, my friend then, about how you get a horse, or how you meddle with the parson's property?"

"Not at all. Of course, knowing that all the parsons have is robbery, I don't mind taking a little of it when I can."

"Very good."

"Well, I was saying, if we could only get hold of a couple of good horses out of the rector's stables, it would be a capital thing, I think. What do you say to it, Duval?"

"I say yes, if it can be done; it is quite clear to me that before I am twenty-four hours older, a horse I must have, and it is very immaterial about whose stable it comes out of, provided it is a good one, and I can make it attached to me; which there is no great difficulty in doing if you try it."

"That I believe, Duval, that I believe fully; and if you give your free consent to the plan, I will take you to the rector's stables at once."

Duval was rather amused at the extreme coolness and simplicity of Luke, for he talked of stealing a couple of horses from the rector of the parish as calmly as though he projected something that was not at all of an out of the way character; indeed, if he had proposed going to lunch with the rector, it would have been done in much the same easy tone of voice.

They had both walked, or rather run on, for they had got into a half run, rather rapidly; and by the time this little conversation regarding the rector's horses was over, they had got quite out of ear-shot of the men who were keeping guard at the little wood. Luke led the way now from the main road into a lane, and then crossing a stile, he said to Duval:—

"We have only to get across a couple of meadows, and we shall come to the rector's stables; which, I have reason to know, are not very well taken care of."

"One would think, though," said Duval, "that if the horses are valuable, they would be taken care of well."

"Yes, but the rector is not quite aware that the man who is supposed to sleep at the stables has gone off to drink at the 'Crown' every night, and that the horses are left to look after themselves in the best way they are able."

"That will do," said Duval; "it would be quite a pity not to take some advantage of such a providential dispensation."

They now crossed the two meadows in perfect silence, and crouching down close to an iron hurdle fence, Luke listened for a short time; and then he whispered:—

"All is right; there's not a mouse stirring. Come on, this way; creep through the fence, and there's less chance of being seen."

They crossed the fence in this way, and then Luke led Duval into a stable yard; and pointing to a door, he said:—

"There's a couple of capital nags I'll be bound may be got out of there; but the door is locked, I dare say, though I have known it to be left open as careless as possible; and so it is now—look."

The stable door was only on the latch, and both Luke and Duval entered it. The place was much too dark to make any choice of cattle in, so Duval made up his mind to be satisfied for the present time with the first horse he could lay his hands upon; and accordingly he led one out into the yard.

Luke in a moment appeared with another.

"Don't mount," he said; "let's lead them to the high road first."

This was good advice, but Duval said in a whisper—

"Can you find a saddle?"

"Oh dear yes, to be sure; it would be a poor look out to go away without one. The harness-room is close at hand here. Only wait a few moments and I'll soon bring the requisites."

Luke was quite as good as his word, for he was back in a very short time well loaded with all the requisites for a couple of horses.

"You seem," said Duval, "to understand this sort of thing, and to be particularly conversant with these premises likewise."

"Why yes, I am a little—just a little. You see I was once a groom to the rector, and that's how I come to know the place."

"Oh, indeed. Then you probably know the horses likewise?"

"I know that there isn't a bad one in the stable, though I can't exactly say what ones we have hold of, for the old man has been buying some fresh bits of blood since I was with him."

While this little bit of conversation was going on, both Claude and Luke were busy in putting the saddles upon the horses, and as they were both pretty good adepts at that sort of work, they got done—notwithstanding it was dark—pretty well at about the same time, and they gently led the horses away. It was necessary to pull up one of the iron hurdles to get the horses past that fence, but there was no difficulty in doing so, and then they quickly enough crossed the meadows. They had to skirt the one next to the lane until they reached the gate, which Luke unfastened, and then they got safely into the lane.

"Now for it," said Luke; "get on, Duval, as quick as you like, on the London road; and when you come to the turning to the left, that will lead round by Finchley to Hornsey, I will call you, sir."

"Ti' at will do," said Duval.

He urged the horse on, and he was not a little gratified to find, by the pace of the creature, that it must be one of no ordinary value. The canter that he put it to was remarkably easy too, so that he was well satisfied with his bargain. The darkness effectually prevented him from seeing the colour or any points of the steed; but upon the principle that a good horse cannot be of bad colour, he made up his mind that he was a beauty.

Several times he glanced behind him to see how Luke was getting on, and by seeing that he kept a relative distance between them without breaking at all into a gallop, he was satisfied that his new friend's steed had likewise turned out to be one of the right sort, and that they both superbly mounted.

"To the left," cried Luke, suddenly, and Duval at once obeyed the direction, and found that they were among those beautiful green lanes that lie so thickly over that part of the country.

"The first to the left," again cried Luke; "and then the second to the right, if you please."

Come," said Duval, "you had much better take the lead in these lanes, for I confess I don't know them sufficiently well to be quite certain about my route; I might succeed in floundering through them somehow, and in getting to my destination, but not with expedition; so I will follow."

"Very well, sir; I will lead now, if you like; but recollect, that although I have made very free with you, Mr. Duval, during the time that we were making our escape from the cave and finding a horse a piece, I am not unmindful that I am not companion for you."

"How do you mean, Luke?"

"Why, sir, as I have told you I was the rector's groom, that's all; and before that I was a poor country fellow—and since that I have been a poacher, sir."

"And what follows from all that, Luke?"

"Why just that as I have left the poaching, I must take to some sort of service again, that's all, sir. I understand a little bit of gardening—and I understand a horse, and, in fact, there's few things in and about a country house that I could not turn my hand to."

"Why, Luke, I can find you a master, then."

"Can you, sir? Really! and without a character, too?"

"No: with a good character. I will take you myself. At Hornsey I have a house—and a garden—and a wife."

"You don't say so, sir?"

"Indeed but I do; and when I am away on the road it would give me a good deal of satisfaction to know that there was some one there upon whom I could depend as completely as I can upon you. So, if you like to enter my service and stay at home, you may do so, and I can promise you liberal wages, at all events, and a good home."

"Can you doubt, sir, for a moment, that I would grasp at the opportunity? It's the very thing I would like above all others."

"Then let it be considered as settled, Luke; and now we will push for Hornsey at once, and when you get there you may consider yourself quite at home."

"Well," said Luke, "this is indeed a change in my fortunes that I little expected or calculated upon. It has been a lucky thing for me that you came to the old cave, though those rascals were very near taking your life."

"Which they would have done but for you."

"Well, I am glad, indeed, that I had it in my power to warn you of your danger in time. I can just fancy how furious the captain will be, when he finds it all out. Turn to the right, now, sir, and then we can push on for a mile without turning."

They rode on, and in due time drew up at the garden gate of Duval's house at Hornsey.

It may be well supposed that the long absence of Duval had very much terrified May. At the sound of his footsteps now, she at once rushed out to meet him, and not observing that any one was with him, she cried—

"Oh, Claude, Claude, where have you been?"

"In all sorts of places, my dear May," he said. But I am safe you see,

and although I really intended to have been here many hours ago, this will be a good lesson to you after all—Never expect me until you see me."

"I will think of nothing but the joy of seeing you here."

"That will be sufficient, May, and the pleasure of seeing you obliterates all the past from my recollection. Luke, take the horses. I will get a light and come to you, and show you the stables in a few minutes."

"Yes, sir," said Luke.

"Who is that?" whispered May. "Who is that?"

"A friend who chooses to serve me in the capacity of a servant. He has saved my life, and I have taken him into my service. He will be here always when I am absent, and he will nurse sweet flowers for you; and in fact he will be serviceable in many different ways, and I believe truly may be thoroughly trusted."

"If you trust him," said May, "I will."

"That is right; and now let us find something for supper, for to tell the truth, I am rather hungry, and I promise you, May, that I will not leave home again until—"

"Until when?"

"To-morrow night, dear one; and then I hope to be back to you before the dawn of another day, for it is not often I meet with such adventures as have fallen to my lot during the last four-and-twenty hours."

CHAPTER XVI.

DUVAL INDULGES IN MUSIC.

DUVAL passed the whole of the day ensuing at his house at Hornsey. He did not anticipate anything in the shape of danger there, for he felt quite confident that he was unknown in that neighbourhood, and that he and Luke had not been traced from the wood in which there had been so much peril.

May would fain have persuaded him to remain yet longer, but as the twilight approached, the temptation to take the road again was too strong for him to resist; and in reply to her entreaties, he said—

"I will promise you one thing, May, and that is to be more than commonly cautious, and you shall be treasurer, too. There is all the money I have; and if I am successful, I hope to add soon a good round sum to it."

"And then you will leave this mode of life?"

"I will."

"You solemnly promise me that, Duval?"

"I do, indeed. As soon as we can call three or four thousand pounds our own, I promise you that I will forsake these perils of the road; but until then, May, it is my destiny to go out and take my chances upon the king's highway."

May felt that it would be quite useless to attempt to dissuade him from going, so she was fain to content herself by the promise she had succeeded in getting from him to the effect that he would be more than commonly cautious in his proceedings, and careful of his safety. She told him that such a promise gave her much satisfaction, but Claude Duval replied with a smile—

"I make the promise to you as you ask for it, but my own opinion, May, is, that safety is not procured by taking care. My experience has taught me

that the impunity with which I have hitherto proceeded in my adventurous career, has arisen from no care-taking, and that I have far oftener owed my safety to some piece of recklessness upon my part than to any foresight."

"Oh, no, no, I cannot think that, Duval."

"It is natural enough, May, that you should not think it. I could hardly expect that you would. But I know it as a truth beyond dispute."

"Then I will bind you by no promises, Duval, for it is your safety only that I care for; so that be accomplished, I care not how. But before you engage in any unusually hazardous adventure, I would ask you to bestow one thought upon me."

"A thousand," said Duval, with a smile.

"Then I will be content."

The night was now creeping on; and agreeably to the order he had received to that effect, Luke brought Duval the parson's horse, which had turned out to be such a capital one; but the moment Duval looked at it, he cried—

"Hilloa, Luke, this is not the horse. It had one white foot and a small light brown star upon the forehead; I noticed as much this morning."

"Not a doubt of it, sir. The horse had one white foot, and a light-colored star on the forehead, just as you say."

"Where are they now, then?"

"Why you see, sir, as the horse happens to suit you, it is just as well that nobody should know him but ourselves, so I made bold to alter those little peculiarities. I have dyed the foot, sir, and dyed the star."

"Oh, that is it."

"Yes, sir; I will warrant now that not all the cunning and all the learning in all the world, could make that foot white again, or re-produce that star. It is rather a secret, the dye, sir, but it is quite effectual."

"I am very much obliged to you, Luke, for your forethought, and I suppose I might meet the parson himself that owned the horse, without the slightest danger!"

"That you might, sir; you might meet him and ask him the time of day, and what he thought of your horse, and yet he could not fancy it had ever been in his stable. It's a glorious creature, and worth as good a hundred pounds as ever were counted out."

Duval mounted and patted the neck of the animal as he said, "I don't quite think I shall ever make such a pet again of a horse as I did of the last one I had. But time may do wonders, and I naturally take to an animal after a little, and get up quite an affection for it."

"You will like this one, sir. May we expect you at any time, sir?"

"Hardly; and yet it's well to get home before the first cock crows; so if you are up and stirring about that time, it may be as well to look out for me."

"I will, sir."

Duval waved his hand to May, who was stationed at one of the windows of the house to see the most of him as he should trot away, and then he went off at a good pace from the gate that led to his stable.

It was customary with Duval to wear a large horseman's cloak over his clothing when he sallied out in this manner to look for plunder on the road; and when he got some mile or two from his starting place, let that be where it might, he would divest himself of the cloak, and rolling it up after the fashion in practice among cavalry soldiers, he would strap it to the back of his saddle.

He wore the cloak upon this occasion, and moreover the hat he wore was very capable of acting as a further disguise, for one of the flaps had a loop and a button, which he could either let it down by, or fasten it up

with, so that in a moment or two his appearance could be very strangely altered indeed.

These were the only precautions in the way of disguise that Duval ever took.

He trotted through the little district of Crouch End, and taking his way right on to the northwest, he got to the neighborhood of Muswell Hill, and so on, to the High Northern Road, running directly through Highgate, at the large Inns in which village it was customary for the coaches starting from inns in the city to change horses, so at that time the North Road was at all times rather an animated one, and not as it is now one of the quietest, although it is far from being one of the least picturesque of the roads out of London. The railway has destroyed the coaches with their cheerful horns and merry look. But the beauties of hill and dale cannot be changed,

and let the march of improvement proceed—but it cannot improve upon Nature.

"Well," said Duval, as he trotted through Highgate; "there ought to be some business to be done between this and Barnet. We shall see—we shall see."

Just before he reached the "Wrestlers' Inn," a four-horse coach, that had been changing, then started at a rattling pace down the slope towards Finchley Common, but Duval had no idea of interfering with the coach. Its four horses were about two too many for him to manage, so he let it go on, and gently trotted on until he passed the valley close to East-end of Finchley, and commenced the ascent upon the opposite side, which would take him right on to Barnet.

"Now," he said, "there ought to be a chance, and I won't be extremely particular as to the shape in which it presents itself."

He took off his cloak, and carefully rolled it up, and strapped it to the back of his saddle; and then he looped up his hat, so that he had a clear view around him; and then loosening his pistols in the holster of his saddle, and setting himself firmly in his seat, he felt that he was ready for any adventure.

Scarcely had Duval made these brief arrangements against the peace and order of society at large, than he heard the tramp of a horse, and from the shortness of the step he could tell that it was a very small horse that was approaching. Drawing off a little to the side of the road, he waited its approach, and in a few moments he saw a man mounted on a pony, that ambled along pretty well, though evidently hardly equal to the weight of his rider.

"Stand!" cried Claude.

"Oh, lord! who's that?" cried the rider.

"The devil! if you like," said Duval, as he rode up to his side. "Now sir, who are you?"

"Oh, don't. I am nobody, sir, if you please. Who are you, pray?"

"I am somebody. But I will trouble you for your cash, Sir. Nobody and you can't complain, as I rob nobody."

"No, sir; that is, yes, sir. But I'm a poor singor, sir, at one of the playhouses, and I have only got a matter of fifteen shillings in all the world."

"Whose horse do you ride then?"

"It's my own, sir, if you please. I ride into town and out every night, and I find it good for my health, you see, sir; and as I have not much time to spare, perhaps you will be so good as to let me go at once."

"Well, if you are a singer, let me have a touch of your quality in that line; I am something of a singer myself, and am very fond of music. Come, sir, strike up. Let me hear the quality of your voice!"

"Very good, sir. What do you think of this?"

"Since laws they were made for every degree,
To curb vice in others as well as in thee,
Some day we will have your company
At Tyburn Tree."

This slight parody upon Macheath's song in the Beggar's Opera, was so well sung, that Duval no longer doubted the fact that it was a professional musician whom he had thus stopped on the highway.

"Hark you, my friend," he said. "You have a very good voice, and a very good wit. It is a very good thing for you that I can appreciate both, and particularly the latter, even when it is directed against myself. If I do ever get to Tyburn Tree, you are quite welcome to come and see me there

but now as you ride for your health, give me leave to tell you that you make one great and almost fatal mistake."

"Mistake, sir! Pray what is it?"

"You ride too small a horse, and to convince you of it, I will trouble you to dismount and walk the rest of the way while your little pony, who is not at all fit to carry so very good a singer, enjoys a run upon Finchley Common until the morning, and don't let me catch you on its back again, that's all, my worthy friend."

"But really"—

"Come, come, no buts for me. What do you take that to be, eh, my accomplished acquaintance?"

"Oh, dear! I can't exactly pretend to say, but it feels very like the muzzle of a pistol trying to get into my ear."

"Very good indeed. If then you have no desire that such an ear-wig should make any further progress into your brains, you will be wise enough to dismount at once."

The singer took the hint, for there was something in the tone of Duval's voice, that, when he chose, was very convincing indeed. The moment he was on the road, Duval turned the head of the pony in the other direction, and started it off at a gallop, leaving its discomfitted owner some six miles from London on foot and no time to spare.

"Good night," said Duval. "You can beguile the tedium of the way you know by practising a little more of the song you have been so very obliging as to sing to me just one verse of."

Humming the tune which the musician had sung with so much effect, Duval went off, at a trot, and he had not got a quarter of a mile from that spot where he had liberated the little pony, when he heard the sound of wheels; and as a man on foot passed him, he called out—

"What coach is that coming on the road?"

"The St. Alban's coach," said the man.

"Thank you! thank you!"

The man passed on, and Duval, after listening for a few moments, and finding by the sound of the feet upon the road that it was but a two-horse coach, and that it was coming along very deliberately, nodded his head as he said :—

"Be it so. I will stop the St. Alban's coach, and see if there be anything to be got inside or out. It will be a hard case if I cannot make something like a decent night's work out of a whole coach-load of people.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SCENE ON THE ROAD.—THE MADMAN AND HIS KEEPER.

DUVAL stopped short on the road side, so as not to be actually in the way of the coach; and then he watched it carefully as it came on with its lights casting a bright glow like an immense flame of fire on each side of the road, lending a passing lustre to the trees and bushes, and awaking the birds who were slumbering amid the still leaves.

"Coach! coach?" shouted Duval.

The coachman pulled up in a moment, thinking that some passenger was on the road side waiting for him.

"Here you are, sir," he said, "outside or in?"

"A little of both, my friend," said Duval, "and I have to advise you, if you do not mind a bullet in your brains, to sit quiet and hold your reins very steady. Stir onward another foot and you are a dead man! Philip, keep a good aim at the coachman's head while I speak to the passengers."

Duval had upon more than one occasion found it to be a very good ruse at night, to affect to speak to some associates, who, from not been seen, inspired all the more terror, as folks did not know then on which side to look for the danger.

"Oh they are highwaymen," cried the coachman, "and there's no end of 'em. I can see their eyes glaring through the hedge like glow-worms. We are all dead men!"

"Peace!" cried Duval. "Not a hair of anybody's head shall be hurt, if no resistance be offered. Comrades reserve your fire, and by no means use your pistols unless I give the word."

With this, having fully convinced everybody that the coach was stopped by a whole gang of desperadoes, of whom he was the captain, he rode up to the side of the coach and said—

"Are there any ladies here?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said a female voice. "Pray spare our lives, good Mr. Highway-gentleman. Me and my niece Jemima, are the only ladies here. Oh, spare us, do good sir."

"Be under no apprehension; madam. No violence is intended on any account if none be offered."

Dexterously taking from its socket one of the coach lamps, Duval now held it close to the upper part of the door so that it shed a clear light within the vehicle, while the shaded side of it was towards his own face, so that he was not at all confused by the glare.

The coach contained two ladies and two gentlemen. One of the gentlemen was a mere youth and looked very pale—the other was rather a ferocious-looking man, with a countenance expressive of great intemperance; and as the light fell upon him, he cried—

"What, are we to be robbed by vagabonds? I only wish I was armed, I would soon put an end to this affair. Ah, that I would; bother me if I wouldn't.—Ah!"

"Sir!" said Duval. "I will attend to you in a few moments. Where is Jemima?"

"Oh, gracious!" exclaimed an old lady who was wrapped up in a wilderness of shawls, "he wants my niece. Oh, sir, she is in the corner, sir. Pray have mercy upon us all."

"My dear madam, you have no cause for apprehension; but I must see Jemima, if she pleases."

Upon this, rather a pretty looking young girl of about fifteen years of age emerged from the corner, and Duval said to her—

"I am afraid you are frightened, but you need not be. I will trouble your aunt for her money. I don't intend to ask you if you have any. Now, madam be quick."

"Oh, dear, yes. There's my purse, and much good may it do you, you vill—no, I mean you nice man."

"I have no money, sir," said Jemima.

"But my father-in-law has," said the pale-faced youth, suddenly. "He has not only got a hundred pounds in gold with him, that he was going to give a madhouse keeper to keep me, when I am not mad at all; but he has just put his gold watch in one of his boots, for fear you should see it."

"Oh, I'll serve you out for this, Master Harry, or the sun shan't rise tomorrow," growled the man with the rather forbidding face. "You young rascal!"

"What's all this about a madhouse?" said Duval.

"Nothing--nothing, at all," cried the man. "You mind your own business. All you have got to do is to rob us, my fine fellow, and be hanged for it at some other opportunity."

"You are a bold man," said Duval. "Now, my lad, I ask you again what is all this about that you say concerning a madhouse? Never mind this man. I will protect you effectually from him. You tell me the truth."

"The truth," said the lad, "is, that by his ill usage, this man killed my poor mother; but as I am still in his way, he is going to put me in a madhouse, and my hands are tied, and there is a man on the roof to help him. Nobody but this young lady here will believe that I am not mad. Oh, sir, if you can but find out a Captain Russel, who lives somewhere near to White-hall, and tell him that the son of his old friend, Mr. Ambrose Hill, is in such a difficulty, he will save me."

The tone of voice in which this speech was spoken, rapid and affecting as it was, savoured nothing of insanity, and Duval could not help saying to himself—

"If this be madness, there is the strangest
Method in it that e'er I saw."

Twice or thrice the man of whom the lad so spoke made efforts to interrupt him, but a warning glance from Duval had the effect of letting him see that a perseverance in such a course might be dangerous.

"Well, sir," said Duval to the father-in-law, "what have you to say to all this?"

"Oh, the boy is mad!—mad!"

"You and I differ in opinion. Allow me, my lad, to assist you from the coach. What do you think of him, Miss Jemima? has he shown any symptoms of madness since you have been in the coach with him?"

"Oh, no, no."

"He is as mad as a March hare, sir," said the man. "A likely thing that if he were not he would find time in the midst of what he calls his afflictions to praise this young lady's eyes in such an extravagant manner, that the aunt was quite shocked."

"But the young lady was not, and by saying that of him, you have given me the most convincing proof of his perfect sanity that you possibly could, for even by this light I can take upon myself to say, that I have rarely seen such eyes, and rarely expect to see such."

"They are very, very beautiful," said the youth.

Duval smiled as he helped him out of the coach, and released him from a rope that tied his hands behind his back.

"Stay close to me," he whispered to him, "I will protect you from any one who means ill to you."

"Oh, how can I thank you?"

"Hush, we shall have plenty of time to talk. Now, sir, I will trouble you for the hundred pounds you have with you, and the gold watch you have so cleverly hidden in your boot."

"There's the money, and I only hope—well, well, my turn may come some day."

"Help!" cried young Harry, "Help! oh, help!"

Duval turned hastily, and he saw a rough-looking fellow holding the lad by the collar, and trying to drag him away.

"I belong to the 'sylum,'" said the fellow. "He shall come along o' me. We is paid for his being mad, and that's all we care about. Come on, will you."

The pistol that Duval had in his hand was a heavy one, and without

reversing it he gave the fellow such a crack on the head with the barrel of it that he danced again, and then Harry having the use of his hands, ran in upon him, and with more power than one would have expected from him, stripling as he was, knocked him down, and left him rolling in the road, from which he very comfortably slipped over a little stone parapet into a drain, that was conveniently close at hand.

Duval was sufficiently put out of temper at all this not to be very particular in his treatment of the father-in-law ; and as he was not very quick or inclined to get the watch out of his boot, Duval dismounted, and asked Harry to hold his horse for a moment.

"Now, sir," he said, "the watch!"

"You have got quite enough already. Be off with you, while you are in a whole skin," was the reply.

Scarcely were these words beyond the lips of the father-in-law, when he found out the truth of the often disputed proposition, that there is a retribution in this world ; for Duval caught him by the leg, and in a moment he found himself on his back in the road, with a tolerable collection of contusions acquired in the process.

Duval then did not trouble himself further to search for the watch ; but having a horsewhip tucked into a place in the saddle of his steed that was made to receive it, he now possessed himself of it, and began belaboring the father-in-law at such a rate, that he did not know how soon to produce the watch.

"Oh, murder," he cried, "murder! here's the watch ! Stop it—stop it ! Oh, oh, help. Stop the whip!"

"Oh, you have had enough of that, have you?"

"Yes. Gracious, yes."

"Then, sir, take this lesson from me, and never show your brutal temper when you find that you have met your master. What is your name, sir?"

"Oh, oh, my name is Watts."

"Very well, Mr. Watts, now you may get up and resume your seat in the coach as soon as you please, for I and my comrades will soon be off now. Hilloa, my gallant Philip, you can draw off your eight men, and you, Stephen, can get out of the way with yours. Don't shoot the coachman, he has behaved very well."

"That's a mercy," groaned the coachman, "for I have been giving of myself up for a dead man anytime this last ten minutes, that I have."

Mr. Watts gathered himself up from the middle of the road, and with many groans got into the coach again. Duval shut the door, and then in a loud voice, he cried—

"Coachman, drive on."

"Oh, dear, won't I," said the coachman, "with all the pleasure in life, I'll drive on. Good night, gentlemen ; you might have behaved much worse than you have ; and if ever you stop me again, I only hope you will be just as civil and considerate as you have been to-night. Come up. Cluck—cluck!"

The horses started into a good trot, and the St. Alban's coach quickly disappeared from the scene of Duval's encounter with it on the North Road. The young lad, who had been by Duval rescued from his father-in-law, remained close to the horse, and then Duval spoke to him—

"Well, Master Harry," he said. "Who do you suppose I am?"

"A kind friend to me."

"That is a good answer; but you have heard of such a person as a highwayman, I suppose?"

"Yes, and I have heard them spoke badly of, while I heard such a person as a father-in-law spoken well of; but now I feel that in both cases people

are wrong; for the highwayman has been a kind friend to me, and the father-in-law has been the worst of foes. Oh, sir, believe me. I am very grateful to you indeed."

Duval could not but be very highly pleased, indeed, with this speech from Harry Hill, and he replied to him by saying—

"What would you like to do? Have you a home that you could return to if I were to take you there?"

"Oh, no—no. This man Watts is master of what was my home. It is Captain Russel, close to Whitehall, that I would like to go to. He was an old friend of my father's, and I can at once throw myself upon his protection."

"Are you sure of him?"

"As sure of him as I am of you."

"Very well then. I will charge myself with your safe conduct to Captain Russel. He will no doubt be easily enough found; and as I do not intend to remain on the road longer to-night, you shall ride behind me, and I will take you to my home, where you can rest till morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HARRY HILL'S MELANCHOLOY STORY.

THE young lad seemed hardly able to speak for thankfulness to Duval for this offer, and the latter was so much pleased with the liberality and frankness of Harry Hill's ideas, that he felt as if he could have gone through any danger for him.

"If this Captain Russel be really the friend you believe him, your misfortunes will be at an end, and you will have the satisfaction of defeating your father-in law. But how was it that you accuse him of killing your mother? I think you made such an assertion."

"I did—I did."

"Well—well, Harry, if it distresses you to say any more upon the subject, do not do so."

"Oh, no—no. It is not talking about it, that now can add to my distress. I have gone through so much sorrow, that it lies too deeply to be lightly ruffled by mere words."

Duval was quite charmed by the elegant, yet simple phraseology of the lad—for after all, he was no more; and as they cantered on towards Hornsey, he felt quite a pleasure in listening to him.

"When I spoke of Mr. Watts' murdering my poor mother," added Harry, "I did not mean that he actually raised his hand against her, and killed her; but she died through remorse and sorrow at having married such a man. My poor father had not been dead long before she began to think that this Mr. Watts would be a good husband for her; and despite all my prayers and entreaties, and cold looks and open remonstrances of her friends, she married him."

"Ah," said Duval, "when a widow is bent upon marrying again, all the world may rise up in arms against her, and produce little effect."

"She soon found, sir, that it was only for what she had in goods and money that he married her; and to get entire possession of both, he wearied her with solicitations; and when she was, for my sake, firm against them, he commenced a career of ill-use which soon brought her to the grave."

"Well, I won't say it, serve her right, Harry, because she was your mother and I respect you; but I will say, that if a woman, with a child or children, marries again, she don't fall exactly within the sphere of my sympathies, let what will happen to her."

"She died," added Harry, "leaving me the old house, and all its contents. This Watts' tried to persuade me to let him have everything, on condition of giving me one hundred pounds per annum; and when I would not, he commenced a series rather of annoyances than absolutely ill-usage, and finally spread about, without my having the least idea of it, a report that I was mad, and yesterday brought a madhouse-keeper to the house, and treated me as you saw."

"Well, Harry, never mind. I will take you to Captain Russel, you may depend, and all will be well. I only hope that you will not be deceived in him."

"My father saved his life once."

"That ought, indeed, to constitute a bond of union between you and him; but we shall see. You can make yourself quite comfortable for the night, and all will be well. In the morning I will lend you a horse, and we will ride to the neighborhood of Captain Russel's house together."

"But, my dear friend, can you do that with safety?"

"Yes, certainly. I can put on a very different aspect to that in which you now see me, and you will find that I can make my appearance in Whitehall without a tremor."

"I am glad to hear that, for not even to save myself from my mother's bad husband, would I have you go into any danger."

"Do not fear for me. And now here we are close to my house, Harry, where I can promise you safety and quiet rest, at all events; and in the young fresh hours of the morning, we will mount and go to London."

They had ridden at a good pace, so that now Duval drew rein opposite the garden gate of his own house at Hornsey, and in a moment or two, Luke spoke—

"Is that you, sir?"

"Yes, Luke—all's right. I have got a gentleman with me."

"Very well, sir. I will open the gate if you will ride in, sir. It's all clear, right on to the stable, sir. I will get a light directly, if you please."

Luke thought that it was much better, considering who and what Duval was, not to get a light until the horse was right into the yard, and the gate shut after him, as then no one could see who it was that had ridden in. But in a few moments the lantern was brought, and then Luke was not a little surprised to see a youth with Duval.

"You need not think anything of the young gentleman's presence," said Duval. "He knows who and what I am, and I am quite sure he may be thoroughly trusted with the secret of my residence here."

"I should," said Harry, "be almost induced to kill myself, if I imagined you thought me capable of any baseness towards you."

"Make yourself quite easy upon that head," said Duval. "I have no such thought, believe me; so now come in. We shall want both the horses tomorrow morning, Luke."

"Very good, sir."

Duval and his young companion went into the house, where he soon introduced him to May; but notwithstanding they rang repeatedly for Luke, he was not to be found; and as May had let the person who usually did the domestic work of the place go to bed, they were obliged to wait upon themselves.

We can account satisfactorily for the absence of Luke.

When he let Daval and Harry Hill into the premises by the garden, he had

seen, or thought he saw, the figure of a man skulking along the road-way just opposite. Not feeling quite certain that such was the case, although his, Luke's, eyes were pretty well schooled to out-of-door sights, he had said nothing to Duval upon the subject; but the moment he had put the horse in the stable, he left the premises by another gate, and crept cautiously up the road close to the hedge, for the purpose of discovering if he were right or wrong in his conjectures.

Luke had not got on far in this way, before he ran against a man crouched down close to an old chestnut tree that was nearly opposite Duval's gate.

"Hilloa," said Luke. "Who are you?"

"Who are you?" said the man.

"Only a poor fellow looking for a job, sir."

"Ah, indeed, you are looking for a job—are you? What kind of a fellow are you?"

"Well, sir, I hardly know. The fact is, I am not very particular what I do, so that it is honest, and I can earn a shilling or two, for times are very hard, perhaps as you know, sir."

"Are you belonging to this place?"

"Lor' bless you, no, sir, I am on the tramp, and don't know what place it is. But I suppose it is Hampstead."

"Humph! I suppose you are a desperate coward!"

"Coward? No, sir, that I am not. I am afraid of nothing in the world, and my friends won't give me any help, because they will have it that I am as strong as a horse, and they keep on saying, 'Why don't you go for a soldier?' till I'm sick of hearing of them, sir, that I am."

"Well, my good fellow, I do think it is quite providential your coming across me, for the fact is I can give you a job that will not put shillings, but guineas into your pocket. What do you say to that, my friend?"

"Say to it, sir? Lor' bless you, you have only to tell me what it is, and it is as good as done out of hand, sir."

"Then I can do you a good turn. In that house opposite to us, there is a man that I have a warrant to apprehend. Now, he is rather a troublesome fellow, and as I am only single handed here, of course, I am very glad to get some assistance."

"Yes, sir; who is he?" said Luke.

"Why, his name is Noakes, but that is of no sort of consequence. All you have to do, is to help me to secure him, and I will put a pair of handcuffs upon him, and take him away, and for the job, I will give you a couple of guineas."

"But are you sure, sir, he is the man?"

"Quite. By mere accident, I was here some days ago, and I saw him come out. I know his face so well, that I cannot be mistaken. He is the man."

"But surely, sir, you can get some of your friends that you have told about him being here to help you?"

"Why, you idiot, do you think I would be fool enough to tell anybody, when I want him all to myself? No, hardly. If you don't like the job, say so, and be off at once. It is quite clear to me that your courage is oozing away, and that you will be of no use to me."

"Then, sir, you are much mistaken," said Luke. "I only like to know as much as possible about what I am going to do always; and if you will assure me I shall have the two guineas, you may depend upon me flying at him the moment you say, 'There he is!' and laying hold of him with a grip, that he will find it no easy matter to get out of."

"You are a fine fellow, and I will make your reward no less than five guineas. There, what do you say to that?"

"Nothing at all, sir, but that I would lay hold of the devi himself by the tail, and hold him till you came up, for that money."

"Come on, then!"

"What, are you going to ring at the gate, sir, or to knock at the door?"

"Hardly. What am I going to do, is to make my way into the garden of the house, through the hedge, which I see is the only fence to one part of it, and then we can be guided by circumstances."

"So we can, sir—so we can."

Now, if this officer, for such he was, who had chanced to see Duval as he came out of his house, and who had been prowling about ever since, had not been so full of cupidity that he wanted all the reward for the capture of Duval himself, and so could not bring his mind to inform any of his brother officers, there is very little doubt but that the career of our hero would have ended on that night, for in a couple of hours, with the certainty that Duval was in that house, the officer could have brought to it a sufficient force to have rendered the success of an attack quite certain, so far as regarded the death of Duval if he had chosen that rather than captivity; but he would not do that. The idea of achieving the affair single-handed, or with such adventitious assistance as the sum of five guineas could afford him, was really too seducing.

And when we come to consider that the reward for Duval was near to one thousand five hundred pounds, we can hardly wonder that the imagination of the officer was led astray by the glitter of such a sum."

Little did he imagine the snare he had fallen into in speaking to Luke, and making to him his proposals.

They now (that is, Luke and the unsuspecting officer) crossed the roadway, and after some little trouble, forced a passage through the hedge that had been spoken of into the garden of the house, and when they were there the officer said—

"Now, my friend, the grand thing will be to get him out of the house, you know, for in the open air we can do much more than anywhere else; and he cannot dodge, as he might, up and down staircases, and through rooms that he knows all about, but of which we know nothing at all."

"But is he alone in this house?" asked Luke.

"No there is a young girl, and a sort of stable fellow, or gardener, who, I dare say, is as great a rogue as his master; but that is all, and if we are not a match for them, I think it will be a very odd thing indeed."

"Oh, very—very."

The officer now, by the dim night light, began carefully looking at his pistols, and Luke said to him—

"Lor, sir, you don't mean for to go to say as you will shoot him?"

"I don't know what I may do, my good friend. At all events, it makes no sort of difference to you, you know, whether I shoot him or not."

"Oh, dear no. As long as I get my money, what can it matter to me whom you shoot?"

"Exactly. Now I would give something to know where that gardener sort of fellow may happen to be. But there is one good thing in this affair, and that is, that as we are on the side of the law, all the harm that is given is all the better, you know, for us. What now, if you were to get up the house and call out in a loud voice. 'Hilloa! Hilloa!' I rather think that the fellow I want would come out to see what was the matter, and then I could pop him down in a minute. I don't want to kill him, but I shouldn't mind wounding him in a way that he was quite helpless; for if I can get him to Newgate with a breath or two of life in him, it would be a great thing to me."

"Then you'd shoot him as he came out of his own house to see what was the matter?"

"Of course I should."

"Very good. I somehow don't fancy, do you know, calling him out without having a pistol in my hand. Will you lend me one of yours, and then I will do it in a moment?"

"Oh, stuff! you will just make a blunder if you have any fire-arms. I have only one pair of loaded pistols with me. You be off, and call him out while I hide behind this apple-tree, and I'll manage him."

"I don't like."

"You don't like? What do you mean by you don't like? Are you going to tell me that after coming thus far, you are going to draw back? Are you afraid, or do you want more money?"

"Why, perhaps I am a little afraid, as I have got no pistol. I should feel like a lion, if I had a pistol."

"Well—well; take this then. It is loaded carefully, so do you mind what you are about with it, and don't fire unless you see me in a difficulty."

"A difficulty?"

"Yes, if you see me in a decided difficulty, blaze away, but not before, mind you; and now let us get on."

"Well," said Luke, "do you know it strikes me that you were never in such a difficulty in your life as you are in now, and you will never be in such another in this world, whatever your troubles may happen to be in the next."

"What do you mean? Are you mad?"

"Not at all; but the Noakes that you want out of this house, is Claude Duval the highwayman, and I am his man, the gardener sort of fellow. What do you think of your difficulties now? I think you will indeed be inclined to admit that you are too clever by half."

At these words the officer was so completely staggered that he stepped back and tumbled right on a currant bush.

"Get up," said Luke, "and don't bury yourself. Now I have a proposal to make to you, my friend, which it will be the wisest thing in the world for you to adopt, because it gives you just a chance of getting away."

"Murder!" said the officer; "I'm a dead man!"

"No you ain't but you may be, you know. There's no saying what may happen in a little time. I am quite resolved that you and I shall fight a duel."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DUEL BETWEEN LUKE AND THE OFFICER, AND ITS RESULTS.

THE officer did succeed in scrambling to his feet, and as the moon just then peeped out from behind a dense mass of clouds, and shone with great brilliancy he and Luke could see each other remarkably well.

"A duel?" said the officer. "What do you mean by a duel?"

"I mean a fair fight, at about twelve paces; you may fire at me, and I will fire at you. If you hit me, you may go off; but if I hit you, I will bury you in the garden."

The officer shook again.

"Let me go," he said. "You may take my word now, after what has happened, that I won't say one word about this place, or who lives here only let me go in peace."

"Yes, I will trust you just as much as I would trust a famished fox in a

poultry-yard. No, you must fight. Come, you can stand where you are, and I will go back twelve paces, or thereabouts. We will fire together, and when I say one, two, three, it will be the signal, you know."

As he spoke, Luke backed along the gravel-path of the garden, but before he had got to the distance he thought of going, the officer rapidly raised his pistol and fired, saying—

"Take that, then, if you will have it; and I hope it may do you some good, you scoundrel."

"I'm hit," said Luke.

"A good job, too."

The officer ran towards the gap in the hedge; but although Luke had fallen, he still kept his hold of the pistol he had in his hand, and levelling it after the officer, he pulled the trigger, just as he was scrambling through the gap in the hedge.

With a loud cry the officer fell backwards, and rolling twice over, there lay without motion upon the pathway. In another moment, out rushed Duval with a light in his hand; but the wind blew it out instantly. He then flung it down upon finding that the moon was shining brightly, and he called in a loud voice—

"Luke, Luke, what is all this? Who fired a pistol just now? Where are you, Luke?"

"Here, sir," said Luke, faintly. "This way, sir. Here I am on the grass-plot."

Duval went forward in the direction of the sound immediately, and to his astonishment, he saw Luke lying on a small grass-plot that was close to the gap in the hedge that had been made by the officer.

"Why, Luke, what's the matter? Speak to me, I beg of you, and tell me what has happened!"

"He has done for me, I think, sir."

"Who? who?"

"An officer, sir, who has been dogging about the place for I don't know how long. He and I have had a shot at each other; but the treacherous rascal took me at unawares, and hit me."

"Where, Luke, where?"

"Right in my ribs here, sir, I feel the blow of the bullet; and I'm as sick as a dog. I must be bleeding inwardly, sir, as there's none on my clothes; but a man can't get a pistol bullet in his stomach and live, I know. Good-by, sir; I have done all I could for you, and now I am going."

"No, no! I will carry you into the house and see what can be done for you. There's many a bad wound, Luke, got over when it's least expected. Be still and I will carry you gently into the house, my fri^dd."

With these words Duval lifted Luke from the ground and carried him into the house, right into the room where he and May had been sitting, and where another candle was upon the table. May was excessively alarmed; but when she saw what she thought the dead body of Luke, she almost fainted.

"Get some warm water, May," said Duval, "and some linen; tear up anything so that you are quick. Our friend Luke is badly wounded, I am afraid, by some one who came to take my life; but I hope he may recover yet. I will but dress the hurt the best way I can, and then go for the nearest surgeon."

Upon this, May summoned all her presence of mind, and left the room to get what Duval required.

"How do you feel now, Luke?" said Duval.

"Not any worse, I don't know how it is, but the bullet went in here, and I don't feel much of it."

He pointed to his breast as he spoke, and Duval at once tore open his

waistcoat, in which there certainly was a little jagged sort of hole; but, singular to state, there the bullet had stopped, as if after perforating the waistcoat, Luke had been shot-proof—for certainly, wound there was none.

"Why you are not hurt a bit," said Duval; "it's all fancy, my good friend. I rejoice to say that you are not hurt in the least. Here, swallow this glass of brandy, and you will be all right again in a minute."

Luke could hardly believe his senses, but he tossed off the glass of brandy that Duval offered him, and then he said:—

"But I felt it hit me, sir."

"Well, then, Luke, you are a necromancer, for the bullet, if it did hit you, has flown off you again as it would off a plate of steel, for touched you are not."

"But it knocked me right over, sir. Oh—oh—oh! Here it is! oh!

"What is the matter, Luke?"

"Only look here, sir. Now I understand it. Hero's a five shilling piece, sir, that you gave me to get a new pair of bridle-ends with; I put it into my waistcoat pocket, and only see, sir, if the bullet has not dented it right into a cup shape. No wonder it knocked me down. It is this, sir, that has saved me, or I should have been a dead man."

As he spoke, Luke took from his waistcoat pocket the crown-piece that had saved his life, and sure enough the ball from the pistol had indented it so that it would have held a tea-spoonful of any liquid. At this moment, May, still pale with anxiety and fright, returned with warm water and some linen for bandages; but Duval turned to her with a smile, saying.

"Our friend is all right again."

"Right!" cried May; "is he not shot?"

"No, this coin in his waistcoat pocket saved him. He will, I fancy, keep it as long as he lives as a curiosity, for he will never have the opportunity of getting such another. These things don't happen twice in the course of ones life."

"Indeed they do not," said May.

"I will keep this crown-piece as a remembrance of to-night's adventure," said Luke, "if you permit me, sir?"

"Permit you? Certainly I will."

"But there were two pistol shots," said May. "Don't you remember, Claude, that you started up at the first, and that the second sounded in our ears before we could leave this room?"

"There were, indeed," said Duval. "Who fired the other, Luke?"

"I did."

"You did? and pray with what effect? for now it appears if the officer is off and away, this will be no home for me another hour. We will pack up and be off, May, for he will soon bring force enough to make it a matter of impossibility for us to cope with them. This is no home for me."

"Nor for me," sobbed May.

"Stop a bit," said Luke. "I strongly suspect that unless he had a five-shilling-piece in the middle of his back, you will find him lying in the garden. He had his shot at me first, and it was, as you see, sir, a tolerable good one; and then as I lay upon the ground, fancying my life not worth the next two minutes' purchase, I had my shot at him."

"He fell?"

"He did; and if I am any judge of such matters, we shall find him there still."

"Oh, this is terrible!" said May.

"It is to your gentle spirit," said Duval; "but what would you have me do, May? This man, for the mere love of money, comes out armed with deadly weapons, for the purpose of taking my life. What would you have

me do? Am I to sit calmly, and allow these men to come at their good pleasure, and drag me to a felon's cell, or, for fear he should not be able to do so with perfect safety to himself, maim me first, and convey me bleeding to the prison?"

"Oh, Claude! do not speak so."

"And yet it is so, May. I rob upon the highway for my subsistence, but do not take life. On the contrary, I have allowed many a rich booty to slip through my fingers rather than I would obtain possession of it at the price of blood."

"That I am sure of, Claude."

May clung to him and wept, for she had not yet seen Claude look so severe, or heard him speak about his position, and the perils that surrounded it, so seriously before.

"Say no more," she said; "oh, say no more! I will now return to my chamber. Settle this unhappy affair yourselves, and I will ask no further questions concerning it. It is better that I should know no more, for then my imagination will be free from anything to brood over, in the solitary hours when you are far from me."

"You are right, May! you are right! Go to your room, and leave Luke and me to settle the affair entirely."

Upon this, May retired at once from the room, and then Duval, turning to Luke, said, "Come, we must go and see what amount of mischief has been done to the officer. The moon is yet shining brightly, and we need no other light. Come at once!"

"I will follow you, sir."

Duval and Luke now made their way to that spot in the garden where the officer lay, and by the bright beams of the moon they now observed him lying upon his back, and Duval, who was walking first, took but once glance at his face, and then, turning to Luke, he said,—

"Quite dead!"

"I thought as much by the way in which he fell. He went over, and over, as like a rabbit when you have hit it by a good shot as possible. Well, I do not feel many compunctions, for his attack upon me was so dastardly; it was like a murder."

"It was, Luke; but what are we to do with him?"

"Bury him, sir!"

"But where, Luke?"

"Here, in the garden, sir. We can easily find some odd corner in which to place him. It is the only safe and easy thing that can be done. He's dead, and no one will hear any more of him in this world, sir; and it's a comfort to know that in all ways he brought his death upon himself, and that neither you nor I can really be blamed for it at all."

"Yes, Luke, that is something; and as you say, I do not see any other mode of disposing of him than by burying him; so it is better that we should do so at once. Get a couple of spades, and we will both set to work."

"Ay, sir," said Luke; "we will soon get a trench big enough to put him in comfortably. He was a very bad fellow, sir; worse, I should say, for the most part, than officers in general; for everything he wanted to do had something treacherous about it."

Luke went to a little tool-house that was in the garden, and soon returned with a couple of spades, and then he selected a very refined spot where the ground would not have to be disturbed again, in which to dig the officer's grave.

"Here, sir," he said, "nothing will grow, and it ain't at all likely that any one who may have this house after you will dig up this bit of the ground; you see, sir, not a bit of sunshine can get to it at any part of the day, and then

it is always dark, dreary, and damp ; so it will just do for a grave, for it seems to be just cut out for one."

"Come on, then. Let's be as expeditious as possible in getting this rather ugly job over, Luke."

They began now working away, and as they did it with a right good will, it was truly astonishing to see what progress they made. In somethin' less than half-an-hour they had a grave dug for the officer ; and then, as Luke wiped his brow, he said, in a low voice,—

"I hope that young gentleman you brought here with you will know nothing of this job?"

"It is not likely, Luke. You had hardly left us with the horses when I showed him to bed, for he was thoroughly tired out and could hardly keep his eyes open. Before, however, I retire myself to get an hour's sleep, I will take care to ascertain what he has heard, and what he thinks of it."

"Do so, sir ; for this is a secret that it will be much more satisfactory to think remains in your and my keeping than in any one else's. I will fetch the body, sir."

"You have no repugnance, Luke?"

"Not a great deal, sir. Of the two I would rather this affair had not happened ; but the fellow firing in such a cowardly way first, has put out of my head all feeling for him, and I am quite sure that such a man is a good rid-dance to society."

With this, Luke went away, and presently came back, dragging the dead body along by the heels.

"I could not make up my mind to lift him," he said ; "so there he goes in to the grave. Fill up, sir, as quick as you can."

They both worked away in silence, and trod down the earth over the body until the grave of the officer was filled up.

CHAPTER XX.

DUVAL PLAYS AGAIN THE MAN OF FASHION IN LONDON.

DUVAL was anything but well pleased with the whole of this adventure. It involved the taking of a life, and the smuggling up of a dead body, in a way that was anything but gratifying to his feelings ; and yet, although he considered the thing in every possible light, he could not see how it could have been otherwise managed.

"Luke," he said, "there is now another bond of union between you and I, in the recollection of this affair."

"Ah sir, there needed no other than what there was. You have given me a home, and you were very kind and good to me."

"But I owe you much, Luke."

"No, sir, indeed you do not ; and I only hope the death of this man will not give you any uneasiness."

"That I cannot help."

"Ah, sir, I feared as much, notwithstanding what you said on the subject and the manner in which you tried to carry it off ; but the more you think of it, I fancy, sir, the more you will see and feel that nothing else could have been done but what was done."

"That, I freely admit, Luke ; and it is a positive fact, unless I had chosen to give myself up to the first officer of the police who chose to come and de-

mand me to lead me forth to execution. It is not the deed itself that has brought regretful feelings to my mind, but it is the necessity for it."

"Well, sir, it is a pity, if you look at it in that way."

"It is; but now go to your rest Luke, and I will go to mine, and above all things, keep this affair from the knowledge of your mistress. Her gentle nature would be horrified at it, and the idea that the garden held such a secret would haunt her day and night, to her great detriment and unhappiness."

"I would not, sir, wish she knew it for worlds."

"That is right, Luke. Let the horses be got ready to-morrow morning at an early hour; for the young gentleman and I are going to town upon his business."

"It shall be done, sir."

Duval went into the house again, and it required all the gentle converse of May to soothe him into even a partial forgetfulness of the scene in the garden; but when the bright morning came, many of the gloomy feelings that the night's adventure had engendered in his mind were dissipated, and he could almost smile at his own fears. He took a more rational view of the whole affair; and if he regretted it none the less, he did not so closely as he had done associate it with his feelings.

The young lad whom he had rescued from the unjust father-in-law, looked as happy again as he had looked over-night; and after partaking of a capital breakfast, he and Duval mounted, and set off for London.

Duval, upon this occasion, rather astonished the young lad; for as he was going into a portion of the City where he would probably meet with people of fashion, he had attired himself in conformity with their usages.

Duval, however did not wish to be at all known in his old character of the Count, with the highly fashionable reputation that clung around him during his sojourn in the handsome apartments in Spring Gardens; and, accordingly, he had with great art disguised himself so that those who had known him most intimately would not have recognized him.

As one part of his disguise he wore a handsome pair of jet-black moustaches, which were so well put on that it would really be next thing to impossible for any one to detect them being false. His hair was naturally of that colour, but by wearing it in so many different fashions he could give quite different aspects to his face; and upon this occasion he wore it in long curls right on to his shoulders.

"Now, my young friend," he said, "you know what I am, and who I am, but my secret I know well is safe with you, and if you meet me anywhere after to-day, all you have got to do is to cut away and affect not to know me."

"Oh, that I could not do."

"Oh yes, it is by far the best plan."

"But my grateful feelings towards you would not let me do it. If I meet you I must long to shake hands with you."

Duval was sensibly affected by this kind and artless gratitude from the young lad; but he spoke to him very seriously upon the subject, saying in a low voice:—

"Nay, it would give me the greatest pleasure perhaps to shake hands with you, but if you chance to see me it is quite impossible for you to tell how I may be situated. Recollect that my life is one of the strangest vicissitudes and most hair-breadth escapes; and by your recognizing me at some inopportune moment, it is just possible you might be involving me in the greatest danger."

"If I were to do that I should never forgive myself."

"I know it would give you great pain, and therefore it is that I ask you to make me a promise."

"I cannot refuse to make you any promise that you may choose to require of me."

"It is just this, that let you see me where you may you will not recognise me, nor in the least way affect to know me unless I make the first advance towards you. If I do so, you will then feel assured that you will do me no harm by speaking to me. Will you give me your word to that effect?"

"I will—I do."

"Then I am quite satisfied, my young friend; and believe me it will be no small gratification to me to see you well and happy in the time to come."

"And I, you, Duval; perhaps I shall be able to assist you in getting clear of this terrible line of life, which will kill you if you do not leave it."

"Perhaps so. But let us talk of your own prospects. I will make such inquiry at Whitehall as shall quickly find out this Captain whom you wish to see, and then I will wait to discover if he be the friend you expect or not."

"Of that I have no doubt."

Thus discoursing they made their way to London, and notwithstanding they made anything but speed, the distance was so short that they were soon at Whitehall. That spot filled Duval with painful recollections.

The gloom of his heart spread itself over his face, and his young companion said to him—

"You are not well, Claude."

"Oh yes,—yes I was only thinking of some one this place put me in mind of, that is all."

"Ah, that was some one doubtless to whom you had been kind and good as you have been to me. It is strange, indeed, that you, whom most men would consider to be without the pale of the law, are more generous than those that live within its closest precincts, Duval."

"Say no more upon that head. I will inquire for your father's friend at once."

With a sudden impatience that the young lad could not account for, Duval now set about the inquiry concerning the Captain, that his young companion wished to see, and he was quickly successful; for he found that he was the chief of one of the public offices which abound in that quarter of the City.

"Now," said Duval, "my young friend, you will go to this gentleman; but do not say anything of me; I will wait for you here; and if your reception by him be all that you wish, I should like you to come out to me, and tell me so."

"I will—I will."

The lad, who owed so much to the gallantry and the kindness of Duval, was not absent above ten minutes when he came back; and standing by the side of Duval's horse, he said—

"It is all right. I have been received in the kindest manner. Of course, in obedience to your commands, I have said nothing of you; but will you now permit me to ask him to see you?"

"If you like."

"I will this moment."

With these words in his mouth, he at once went back to the Captain; and then Duval, as he held the rein of the horse that he had lent to his young protege in his hand, urged both the animals forward.

"It is well that we should part here," he said. "He can but do himself harm now by any further connexion with me; and an interview with this personage of whom he speaks, can do me no good. So, farewell."

A sharp trot took Duval past Westminster Abbey, and then stopping at the first livery stable he came to, he rode down the gateway, and put up both the horses at once. On foot then, he, by a circuitous route through the

Park, got again to the immediate neighbourhood of St. James's. That David had a design in all this, who shall doubt?

"In St. James's Street, at that period, there was one of the finest establishments, resembling the modern club, that ever was set going in London. It was kept tolerably select, and the utmost surveillance was kept up at the door, that none but the elite of society should enter. Trusting to his appearance, which was highly favourable, Duval strolled up to the door of this establishment, and walked in.

Far from any opposition being offered to him in so doing, the doors were most officiously held open for him by the servants. He entered what was called a newsroom, and there found some gentlemen killing time in the best way they were able. He heard one say to the other—

"Is it time yet?"

"Hardly, my lord," said the other. "It will be a bore to be too soon at the affair, and I cannot help thinking it will be a bore when we get there."

"Why, the fact is, the Prince is rather too young for this sort of thing, just yet."

"That's what I think, my lord; and the mystery of the thing is, that we don't know who is invited, and who not. It appears that the Prince has given half a dozen tickets to some, to bring with them whom they please, while others have had no end to the difficulty in getting one."

"Why, how many will be there?"

"It is limited to thirty, I understand; and all that is on the tickets are the two letters, P. F."

"And what do they mean? for although I have a ticket, to tell the truth, I did not look at it."

"Why the letters mean Prince's Fête, I believe; but let us be off. It is a sharp enough ride to Kew now, and we cannot be much too soon. I should say."

"Very good. Come along."

"Gentlemen," said Duval with all the cool impertinence in the world, "If you are going to the prince's fete at Kew, I can assure you that you are in good time, for His Royal Highness told me only two hours ago, that he hoped no one would come very early, as he had taken a small quantity of claret last night, and was as even princes may be at times."

The two gentlemen bowed, and one of them said—

"We have not the pleasure of knowing you, sir."

"I am Baron Hoge, a noble of the Roman Empire, a general in the Sicilian service, and a relative of the queen."

The two gentlemen bowed again.

"But," added Duval, "I don't trouble the queen much, for my age and my taste, I must confess, incline me more to the amusements of the prince, who if he were a little older, and not quite selfish, and a glutton, would be very good company, and make plenty of amusement for men of the world."

"You speak freely, sir."

"I do. The fact is, none of the family much mind what I say; but you will do me one favor, gentlemen, if we meet, as no doubt we shall at this fete, and that will be to say nothing to the prince of me, as he and I are going upon a little expedition soon, and he don't want any one to know that I am in the country, as it might get round the ears of the Queen; and there is a certain little blue-eyed cousin of hers, whom she is rather irate at, for admiring your humble servant."

All this was said with such an air of engaging frankness, that men of the world as these two persons were, they were completely taken in by it, and one said—

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CLAUDE DUVAL AND THE POACHERS.

"Allow me, then, Baron Hoge, to introduce myself; I am Lord Austincourt, and this is Colonel Lane. We are both upon tolerably good terms with the prince, and hope to lead a pleasant life with him for the next dozen years or so, as he certainly seems to be in the vein to emulate his illustrious and much talked-of antecedent, Prince Henry, afterwards King Henry the Fifth."

"He may wish to imitate him," said Duval, "but the copy will be more unlike the original than I am unlike Hercules, I fancy. Have we time and inclination for a bottle of Bordeaux before starting?"

"Both, I hope," said Lord Austincourt.

The bottle of wine was brought to them, and after duly discussing it, Duval sent a messenger to the livery-stable for his horse, describing the one of the two he wanted; and as he had quite arranged that he was to accompany his two new acquaintances to Kew, he mounted at the door of the club, and their horses having been brought round from a neighbouring stable, they did the same.

He saw that they very much admired his steed, and he said in reference to it—

"This is a kind and good creature, and will do almost anything. I thought it cheap at two hundred pounds."

"And so it is," said Austincourt. "I will give the money for it now at once, if you want to part with it."

"No," said Duval. "It is my favourite horse for common use, although I have some in my stable that cost me more than double the amount."

"Can he leap?" cried the colonel.

"A little. Do you see that cart?"

A cart was creeping lazily along, drawn by a donkey, and carrying vegetables; and as he uttered the last words, Duval put his horse at it, and the leap right over the cart was done in a capital and clean style.

"By George!" said the colonel, "I should like to have him. Will three hundred tempt you, baron?"

Duval hesitated a moment, and then said—

"Well, I don't know but that, upon two conditions, it might."

"Name them—name them."

"First, you must let me ride him to-day."

"Oh yes, certainly. By all means."

"Then you must come for him yourself to my place, that I will give you the address of before we part to-day."

"That I will with pleasure."

"Well then, colonel, he is yours at three hundred pounds."

The colonel took out his pocket-book, and at once, in the presence of Austincourt, handed out three notes of one hundred pounds each to Duval, who put them very coolly into his pocket, and then Lord Austincourt said—

"I envy you your bargain, colonel, and if I had been flush of cash just now, I would have bid another fifty; but I am devilish short, and so it is no use talking about it. Let us push on now, for it is near eleven o'clock, and after all we ought to be in tolerably good time, if we are not early."

CHAPTER XXI.

DUVAL MAKES A BRILLIANT BARGAIN.

UPON this they all increased their speed, and Duval enjoyed a most delightful ride to Kew.

It is perhaps necessary that we should now say a few words regarding this fête or private entertainment, which the Prince of Wales was then giving. George, Prince of Wales, afterwards George the Fourth, was then but a very young man, and could hardly be said to be out of tutelage. Already, however, he had begun to give ample evidence of those luxurious habits which stuck to him through life, and which have clung to his memory with no enviable reputation.

He had become the petty tyrant of all around him; and having just awakened to the fact that there was no ordinary limit to his power of self-indulgence, he had commenced that course of selfishness, gluttony, and animal gratification, which he became so famous for, and which royal and illustrious personages are but too apt, by the grace of God of course, to fall into.

The old palace at Kew had been for a short space assigned to him as a residence, where it was supposed that he was completing some portion of his education; but he soon contrived to convert it into the scene of his illicit pleasures, and there were those around him, who took good care to encourage the growing foibles and vices of the young prince.

A man in such a position will never want sycophants, and already the Prince of Wales had his party in the nation, and was accustomed to pass the night with some of the most worthless characters among the aristocracy that could be got together.

This meeting at Kew was intended to celebrate one of those early orgies for which he afterwards became rather too well known, and which he only abandoned when failing health forced him so to do, and he found himself deserted by all save that vile female member of the nobility, who, after his death, and while the clay of the debauchee was still warm with recent life, robbed the chamber in which he breathed his last, and departed with the spoil.

But then she was a marchioness!

The only person that the young prince was most particularly solicitous to keep his orgies a secret from, was the queen, and this anxiety did not arise out of any filial respect, but simply because Her Majesty had it in her power to materially interfere with his enjoyments, by turning him out of the palace at Kew at a moment's notice, as it was in her keeping specially; and when she indulged herself with a walk in its garden, and titillated her royal nose with a pinch of the snuff she was so vulgarly fond of, she little imagined that these groves, and walks, and fountains, and sweet retired places, had recently rung with the vacant laugh of the courtesan.

"Have you been to one of these little meetings before, baron?" said Lord Austincourt to Duval.

"Not here," replied Duval, with a laugh that conveyed the idea that he knew all about them somewhere else; and as the colonel and his lordship had not been to any such parties elsewhere, they set it down in their own minds that Duval knew a little more than they ever did of the freaks of the young prince.

An aspect of appearances at the gate of the gardens and palace at Kew, wa-

not such as would have led any one to suppose that the heir-apparent to the crown of England was there. Only one servant was on duty, but then the grand object was that the whole affair should be kept strictly quiet.

There was one little difficulty that Duval had to encounter with, and that arose from the fact that he had no ticket, and for the last mile he was full of thought as to how he should get over this trouble. Accident furnished him with a good opportunity for accomplishing it.

During the ride, Lord Austincourt had produced his ticket and replaced it in the pocket of his over-coat, and it so happened that the horse which his lordship rode lamed a little just as they got within sight of the royal abode.

"Hilloa!" said the colonel, "your horse has fallen lame, Austincourt. That's a pleasant job."

"Is he, though? Do you see it, baron?"

"Yes," said Duval, "but it's probably of no sort of consequence. He has picked up a stone, most likely; you see this bit of road is full of them. I will dismount and look at his foot for you."

"Oh, no—no, I will dismount myself," I could not think of troubling you."

"Don't mention that. It is no trouble, I assure you, and I am rather a good hand, they say, at anything of this sort; my horse will stand still, or rather, I should say, your horse, colonel. Excuse my saying mine."

As Duval spoke, he dismounted, and so did Lord Austincourt, and as they both stooped to examine the horse's hoof, in which was a small stone, it was the easiest thing in the world for Duval to take his ticket of admission to the prince's fête, from his pocket.

"There, it's gone now," said Duval.

"Upon my word, I am very much obliged to you, baron. I would not have this horse go lame on any account, for I value it very much, and, as all the world knows, I am in no cue just now to buy another."

They both mounted again, and in a very short time they reached the gate of the gardens, at which it was customary for the private friends of the prince to enter. Then, as they dismounted, the servant blew a whistle, and in a few minutes three grooms came to take charge of the horses.

"Hilloa?" said Austincourt, "there is De Lohm, the prince's valet. I'll be sworn he has come to take the tickets, and if so, it is a very private affair indeed."

"It is so," said Duval, with a nod of the head. "Even I am provided with a pass, which upon any ordinary occasion, would not have been requisite, as you may very well suppose."

"Certainly not. He is coming," said the colonel.

"Gentlemen," said the valet, bowing, "I will have the honour of taking your tickets."

"Certainly, good Lohm," said Austincourt, "certainly. I hope both you and the prince are blooming to-day?"

"Quite well, my lord!—at at your lordship's service."

Duval handed his ticket to the valet, who looked at him scrutinizingly; but the ticket was a pass he dare not dispute, for on one side of it were the letters P. F. and on the other a G, was written by the royal fingers of the prince himself, with a peculiar flourish at the tail of it that the valet knew perfectly well, so he bowed and said,—

"Pass on, sir, if you please. This is perfectly right and regular."

"Anybody here?" said Duval.

"Almost all invited, sir. Thank you, colonel—all right. Pass on, if you please."

"Confound it," said Lord Austincourt; "where is my card? I had it only half-an-hour ago. Where the deuce did I put it! I have not so many pockets, either. Hang the thing!—did you not see me with it, colonel?"

"Certainly ; and the baron, likewise."

"Yes," said Duval ; "you took it out of your pocket to look at to be sure you had it."

"Certainly I did, and I put it in this—no it must have been in this pocket—No. I have not got it, that's quite clear, De Lohm."

"It is a pity, my lord."

"It is. But here is the colonel, who knows I had it ; and here is the baron."

"Yes," said the colonel ; "we are both witnesses to that fact ; you know it, baron, as well as I ?"

"It is a pity !" said De Lohm ; "but there is another witness to the fact that my Lord Austincourt had a ticket, and that is myself, for I sent it to his lordship at the express command of the prince. Pass on, my lord ; it is all right. No doubt it has come out of your pocket upon the road, and that shows what a good thing it is to have nothing on the ticket that the uninitiated can understand."

"You are very right, De Lohm," said Austincourt, "and very obliging. I am not the man to forget a little courtesy of this kind ; and as you say, the ticket will be an enigma beyond their guessing to any one who may chance to find it."

The valet bowed, and the three visitors passed the gate of the royal demesne.

"Provoking ?" said Lord Austincourt, "the loss of the card ; but it was very obliging of De Lohm. Don't mention it, either of you, to the prince. It is just one of the little things that he will pretend to make a great fuss about."

"Not a word of it," said the colonel.

"And my lips are sealed !" said the mock baron, "I know George quite well enough to be perfectly aware that if you tell him anything, he generally gets hold of the wrong version of it."

Both the colonel and Lord Austincourt laughed at this remark from Duval, and it tended more and more to confirm them in their belief of his position, for if he had not felt quite upon easy terms with the prince, he would surely, they thought, never have ventured upon expressing himself so freely.

Duval cautiously allowed his new friends to take the lead, and they went along the paths in the shrubbery that led to the palace with practised familiarity, and at length emerged upon an exceedingly pretty lawn, in the centre of the most gorgeous flower-beds that the imagination could conceive.

"That is a beautiful sight !" said the colonel as he looked at it. "They are all rare green-house plants, and are taken in at night, but in the daytime they are so well arranged, that they really have all the appearance of growing and flourishing in the open ground."

"They have indeed," said Duval.

A loud roar of laughter at this moment came upon their ears from the palace, and then all was still again, as if by magic.

"Ah !" said the colonel, "they are at it, I hear already."

"Not a doubt of it," said Austincourt. "But I would always rather be a little later, for if one comes early on these occasions, one is obliged to out with all one's good jokes at once, and then for the rest of the affair look as dull as ditch water. Come on ; I wonder where they are ?"

"Oh, in the painted room, of course."

"Do you think so ? I thought the sounds came from the queen's parlor."

Duval said nothing, but he put on a quiet kind of smile, as if he could have said a great deal if he had so chosen ; and no doubt his two companions so translated it. There is nothing like saying nothing to give a man a reputation for knowing a great deal.

"Let us go in," said Austincourt.

"Agreed," said the colonel.

They all three reached a little low-arched door, which any one would have thought opened upon some of the domestic offices of the palace, and Lord Austincourt tapped at it with a ring that was upon his finger. It was immediately opened by a man elegantly dressed in a court suit, who said not a word, but merely bowing, waved his hand for them to enter.

"Which room, Collings?" said the colonel.

"The Painted Saloon, sir."

"Oh, so I thought. Come on, my lord. Ah! there they go again; I wonder what that is at. Nothing very humorous I'll be bound. A small joke goes a long way at times in certain places, and with certain people."

"It does indeed," replied Duval, to whom this remark appeared to be more particularly applied; "but by the laughter now, one would really suppose it was anything but a small joke."

"Ah! but a great noise is no—

"Hush! Hush!" said Lord Austincourt. "Pray recollect where you are, and bear in mind the old saying, that walls have ears sometimes."

"Thank you for the caution."

At this moment another person, habited like the man at the little door, stepped up to them, and said:—

"Allow me, gentlemen, to show you into the prince's presence. This way, gentlemen, if you please."

A door was thrown open, and a blaze of light from a room that was closed against the daylight, and then brilliantly lighted up with wax candles, shone upon them.

CHAPTER XXII.

DETAILS SOME SINGULAR PROCEEDINGS IN KEW GARDENS AND PALACE.

DUVAL was certainly not at all prepared for the extraordinary scene that presented itself in the room where the Prince of Wales was enjoying himself with his boon companions; he had thought all along that it was rather an odd thing to hold such a class of entertainments in broad daylight, but it had not struck him that that was a state of things that could be easily remedied.

The fact was, that every shutter or loop-hole through which a ray of sunlight could make its way into the room, was scrupulously closed; and it was all lit up in the same way as it would have been had the hour been midnight.

The apartment was rather spacious, and the ceiling was a higher one than is generally to be found in those plain Dutch-looking places, that we owe partly to the no taste of King William and Queen Mary, and partly to the almost lower taste of Queen Anne. It was painted in some allegorical subject, the details of which had nearly disappeared in the course of time, and all you could see was a leg or an arm, or some flaunting piece of drapery that happened to stand out in bright relief from the rest of the subject.

A large oval table was in the centre of the room. The floor was covered with crimson cloth, and a large chandelier, carrying about thirty or forty wax lights, hung from the ceiling. Upon the table was a perfect chaos of decanters, glasses, bottles, and fruits of all kinds and descriptions; and sitting round the table was a party of about twenty persons, each one of whom appeared to be perfectly at his ease.

At one end of the table, upon a large chair, which he occupied in a sprawling manner, was the then young Prince of Wales.

No notice whatever was taken of the new comers, and Duval was glad that was so, as he wished to avoid anything like an inquiry as to who he was.

The colonel and Lord Austincourt managed to find places for themselves, and Duval sat next to them. The door of the room had been noiselessly closed again by the man who had opened it for them, and the fun and jollity went on, without the least interruption, fast and furious. It seemed as though there was enough wine upon the table to effect the complete intoxication of the whole lot ; but Duval wondered that no attendant was present.

"Help yourself, colonel," said Austincourt. "I suppose, baron, you feel yourself quite at home here ?"

"Rather. If he catches my eye it will bring him down a degree or two."

"Who? the prince?"

"Yes. He is perfectly safe with me ; and, yet, nothing will get it out of his head that if he and I were to have a word about anything, I must forthwith go and tell all about these little entertainments, when nothing could be further from my thoughts than such baseness."

"It would be very unfair."

"Oh, most grossly so after actually assisting at them."

"You are a man of honour, baron, and I am very happy to make your acquaintance. Allow me the pleasure of drinking a glass of wine with you!"

"Certainly. With pleasure."

The wine was drank, and then the prince called out in his thick, husky voice—

"Come! Come!—Who was that had a toast to propose? Let us have the toast by all means. Here we are all waiting. Come, the toast. I think it was you, marquis, that had it. Get on with it."

"The toast—The toast!" cried everybody. "The marquis's toast! Bummers! Ha! Ha! Fill to the brim! Bummers! The toast of the marquis—Silence—Order—Now, marquis!"

A lazy, dissipated-looking young man rose to his feet ; and tossing off a glass of Burgundy that he had just filled, he flung the glass on to the floor, as he said,—

"It is nothing particularly new that I have to propose. It is the health and well being, as regards looks and condition—confound all the rest!—of an animal."

"An animal!" cried one.

"Order—order! Silence."

"If you say another word now," said the prince to him who had interrupted the marquis, "I shall have to pour a decanter of Rhenish down your throat."

"Order! Order!"

"Yes," added the marquis, "it's the health, I say, of an animal, and rather a remarkable one too."

"Hear! Hear! Order! Order!"

"Sometimes this animal is fair, and sometimes it is dark, and sometimes it is neither one nor the other. At times, too, you will find the specimen tall, and at times short ; and sometimes this animal is all that is pleasant, while at other times it is as loud and as disagreeable as a gale of wind, and as chilly as winter. In fact, gentlemen, I give you, as a toast, Women!"

"Hurrah!" cried the prince. "Now that's what I call very clever. Who could have supposed now what the marquis meant? Let us drink the toast, gentlemen."

"When people are hanged for wit," said a voice, "The marquis will be brought in not guilty."

A loud laugh followed this speech, and then Duval saw that several of the guests dropped under the table and brought up cool, fresh bottles of wine; and upon glancing there, he saw that several ice-pails, crammed with bottles, were placed quite handy to reach.

"The prince's toast!" cried a voice; and then the cry was echoed by every one at the table; and the prince, as well as he could, considering that he was so far gone in wine, tried to look amiable and modest.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I will give you a toast. I believe it is very usual to drink the health of King George: but I will give you King Wine and all his family!"

The sycophants of the prince, of whom there was a goodly number present, were quite uproarious and frantic in their applause of this toast. These parties affected to be in the most rapturous state of delight upon the occasion, and the prince, as he winked his fat, sleepy-looking eyes round the table, looked satisfied.

This toast was drunk with all possible noise and rioting that could be appended to the operation, and from what was taking place, Duval began to entertain far from an elevated idea of the wit of the party.

But what was wanting in wit was made up by noise; and in our reader's experiences of parties, no doubt, that is found to be very generally the case, as well in other places as where Royalty may be the presiding genius.

"Drink away," said the prince, "whatever you do now, mind you don't spare the bottle."

"That we won't," said Lord Austincourt, "for we know it costs no one anything that is here."

"Oh, are you there, Austincourt?"

"Yes, your highness."

"Oh, don't highness me. When one of these affairs is going on, all the world knows that I am plain George, and no highness at all; so I request every one of you to call me so."

"Hear—hear—hear!"

"Darn it we are not deaf!" cried Colonel Lane, shrinking from his next neighbour, who, with stentorian lungs cried—"Hear! Hear! Hear!" in his ears.

This little incident produced another roar of laughing, and then the prince called out—

"Now, Austincourt, let us have your toast. We generally have a tolerably good one from you upon these little entertaining occasions."

"Oh, yes," cried a man opposite to Austincourt. "He lies in bed for a week to think of his one solitary joke, and it would be quite a cruelty not to give him an opportunity of coming out with it as early as possible."

"Well," said Austincourt, "I would rather lie in bed than I would do as some folks—do nothing but *lie* out of it."

This was a pretty good retort, but it looked too severely personal to be much laughed at; and the man who provoked it bent forward, and said, in bland tones—

"Did you mean that for me, Lord Austincourt? Because if you did, I will throw this decanter at your head."

"I'll be hanged if you do," said one who sat next to him. "It is my decanter. Throw your own, if you please."

This produced a roar of laughing, during which Lord Austincourt and the personage at the other side of the table said, no doubt, very cutting things to each other, which were completely lost in a shout of uproarious mirth. When he could speak from laughing, the prince said—

"Enough of this. Don't you all know that there must be no offence taken at this table?"

"Nor given either," said the man who had quarreled with Austincourt.—
"Nor given either."

Certainly not, major, I agree with you there. I am quite sure Austincourt meant nothing ; so now let us have the toast. Come, Austincourt. If you do lie in bed a week to think of it, it ought to be a good one."

Lord Austincourt rose, and in a solemn tone, he spoke—

"The toast which I am about to propose, is one that I feel assured will be received upon its merits, by this assembly, in the most cordial—pleasant—delightful—joyous—agreeable—heartfelt manner. It is a toast which we have in our hearts, if at odd times it does not show itself exactly upon our faces or in our actions. It is a toast that I feel assured one illustrious personage will be delighted to drink, and, in fine, it is one that, while it ought to bring tears of sensibility from the feeling bosom, at the same time is calculated to strengthen those delightful ties which bind us all to that which is right and delightful. Gentlemen, I give you a toast which may be summed up in one word, and that is—Morality!"

The exquisite gravity with which Austincourt communicated this toast was admirable ; and before he had got to the end of his prologue, every one was almost bursting with laughter ; but when he really uttered the word Morality, the smothered mirth burst into a shout.

"Good—good, capital ! Capital !" cried several ; and the full glasses were drained to honour that word which found not the faintest echo in any one heart that was there present. We have no sort of hesitation in saying that the most really feeling person there present was Claude Duval the highwayman.

An hour had elapsed, and the quantity of wine that had been drunk was rather formidable ; and yet beyond a few red faces and a considerable amount of noise no one seemed very much the worse for what was going on.

The prince's face was probably the reddest of the lot. He was decidedly the youngest man present, and although his head and his stomach might stand excesses with less apparent actual mischief than those of his companions, he was likely enough to show the encroachments of the wine cup superficially much more than they would.

"What's the time ?" cried somebody.

"Helloa !" cried the prince, "a fine, a fine."

"Oh, I forgot it was against the rules to mention such a thing as the lapse of time here. I beg to be excused, gentlemen ; I really sinned in the most inadvertent manner possible."

"Never mind that, you must drink a pint of claret off at a draught, and if you had used the word clock, or actually announced the hour, you would have had to take a quart."

"But I could not."

"That's nothing to do with it : you must have done it. Is he to have the pint, George?"

"To be sure ; give it to him."

The unfortunate who had made himself amenable to the fine of drinking a pint of claret, was about the most intoxicated of the whole party ; or probably he would not have been so forgetful of where he was as to subject himself to such a penalty ; and now a pint goblet was procured, which was filled with claret and placed before him.

"Drink ! drink !"

"Well, if I must, I must. Here goes."

"He is spilling it !" cried one, "he is spilling it !"

"Then give him a quart," said the prince, "and that will make up for the deficiency."

It was in vain that the culprit protested that he had been drinking the pint

in the most *bona fide* manner. A quart goblet was filled and placed before him, and amid the uproarious shouts of the assemblage he began to drink it. There was then something like silence for a moment as he completed the draught, and took the goblet from his mouth. Then he let it fall, and it struck into a thousand fragments. He tried to speak, but he could not, and falling backwards, he lay upon the floor in a state of insensibility that looked almost like death.

One would have thought that this catastrophe would have excited some degree of interest, if not of alarm ; but it did not do so. All that took place was a shout for some one of the name of Stephens, and in answer to the call there came into the room a well dressed man. A glance showed him what had happened, and with a bow he retired again ; but he had been gone a moment when he came back with another, and between them they carried off the insensible form of the first who was prostrated by the spirit of the wine of that bacchanalian meeting.

Duval began to think of what it would be best to do, and he made up his mind now as soon as possible to secure what booty he could and then get away. He noticed that the prince had a superb watch set with diamonds and hanging by a rich chain of exquisitely-worked gold round his neck. Upon his fingers, too, shone several diamond rings ; and Duval did not doubt but that the jewelery he had about him was worth some thousands.

There was certainly one difficulty attending those costly gems and works of art, and that was that if he, Duval, fully succeeded in getting posession of them, it would be no easy matter to find a purchaser for them ; but that was a matter which he reserved for future consideration entirely. At present, he bent all his energies to the acquisition of the costly jewelery of the Prince of Wales.

When Duval made up his mind to a thing of that kind, one may very well imagine that no ordinary difficulties would be allowed to stand in his way in the shape of prevention for long ; but there was one thing that a little distracted him, and that he felt must be well arranged beforehand, and that was the getting away quickly with his horse, which he would not have left behind for all the jewels that glittered upon the fingers of the Prince of Wales, and his watch into the bargain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DUVAL ASTONISHES THE PRINCE, AND LEAVES KEW PALACE.

AFTER some thought, Duval was convinced that the best thing he could possibly do was to get out of the room quietly without observation, and make some inquiries about his steed.

It so happened that this could be done easier now than before, for the prince had began to amuse his royal mind by throwing glasses of wine at the wax candles in the chandelier ; so that his guests were not only sprinkled with the wine and little bits of half melted wax, but the lights were, many of them, put out, and the room looked nothing like so bright and so brilliant as it had.

Duval rose while the prince was blundering through some foolish anecdote ; and stooping, so that his head did not reach much above the level of the heads of those who sat along the side of the table, he reached the door unnoticed ; and opening it suddenly, he ran violently against the person named Stephens who had been called to carry away the gentleman who had been forced to take the undue quantity of claret.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Stephens. "I really beg your pardon most humbly, sir."

"It's of no consequence," said Duval. "I shall want my horse at a minute's notice, that's all, as I have to ride to town for the prince. How can I get it?"

"I will take care of that, sir, if you will do me the honour of telling me your name, sir."

"They will know me at the gate, as the gentleman who arrived with Lord Austincourt and Colonel Lane."

"That is quite sufficient, sir. Any time that you think proper to leave, if you go to the gate, the horse will be there waiting for you, sir, in charge of one of the grooms."

"Thank you--that will do."

Duval at once rushed to the banqueting-room ; but he found that some change had taken place in the feature of affairs, even in the few minutes he had been absent.

One or two of the guests had left their seats ; and although not bad enough to be taken out of the place by Stephens and his comrade, yet had thrown themselves upon a couch or two at the farther end of the room, in the hope of recovering their faculties a little, which begun to be bewildered by the wine, and perhaps more still by the noise and riot.

There was a vacant place next to the prince.

Duval glanced round him and saw that the place he had occupied before was filled up by some one in the course of the changes that had taken place. He at once sat down on the chair by the prince.

This was a cool thing enough for Duval to do, considering that the prince knew nothing of him ; but he relied upon the quantity of wine that the heir-apparent had drank to make him not over particular, provided he had a good companion next to him, as to who he was. Master George was speaking at the moment, so he did not notice who sat down by him.

"Hilloa!" said the prince, when he happened to look in the direction of Duval. "Hilloa!"

"Exactly," said Duval. "That's just my opinion."

The devil it is!"

"Yes, George. Do you see that light at the corner of the chandelier ? I will hit it with this glass of claret or else you may call me what you like—a highwayman if you please, I will bet you what you like, too."

"Done!" said the prince. "I have been trying at that candle for the last half hour myself, and I do believe it has a charmed life, for I can't hit it. Let us try for a cool hundred who puts it out first."

"Done," said Duval. "You try first."

"Well, that's generous. Here goes."

The prince poised a glass of claret in his hand, and let it fly at the light ; but the fact was, that, as he said, he was very much deceived as to the position of the wax candles, and the only effect of the shower of wine he sent at it was to sprinkle his guests well who happened to be near ; but that was highly amusing to royalty, and he laughed outrageously.

Duval now raised his glass, and a voice—it was that of Lord Austincourt—cried out—

"Bravo, baron!"

"Oh, he's a baron, is he?" muttered the prince. "D—n the fellow I don't know him."

Slash ! went Duval's glass of wine, and the candle was at once extinguished.

"Bravo! bravo!" cried everybody ; and there was a great banging upon the table. "That was well done. By Jove, it is getting rather dark, though. Go it. Have them all out. Ha! ha! Bravo, baron!"

These and such like cries resounded through the room ; and the prince, turning to his neighbour on the other side, said, in a tipsy tone—

“ Lend us a hundred pound note.”

“ Haven’t one farthing to bless myself with,” was the cool reply, with a shrug.

“ By Jove, you must trust me, baron.”

“ Don’t mention it,” said Duval. “ The pleasure of seeing you happy, and free from troublesome thraldoms, if it be only for one hour, is so great a pleasure to me that I can think of nothing else.”

“ A devilish gentlemanly, sensible fellow, that,” muttered the prince to himself.

Duval had the diamond-mounted watch of the Prince of Wales now safely in his pocket. At the moment that the prince had thrown his glass of wine at the candle, and when all eyes were fixed upon the flame, Duval had quietly and dexterously possessed himself of the watch, and at once transferred it to his own pocket.

“ Well, you lost that cool hundred, George,” cried one from the lower end of the table.

“ Yes, stupid,” said the prince.

By mere accident the tone of the prince was such an exact imitation of that of the person who had made the rather foolish remark, that the roar of laughter that followed was perfectly prodigious ; and the prince was highly delighted, for he fancied he had, at all events, for once in his life, said a very good thing, indeed. He smiled with gratification ; and when the person who had refused to lend him the hundred pounds to pay Duval said suddenly—“ I’ll stake you another hundred, George,” he took up a glass of wine, and jerking it slap into the speaker’s face he cried—

“ I have won it, by Jove !”

It was really amusing now to see the cool gravity with which the person whose face was streaming with wine, took this insult. He did not wince at it in the least, or make the slightest spluttering, but filling his glass he said, calmly.—

“ That was a royal joke. We will pass it round ;” and then, on the moment he discharged his glass into the face of his next neighbour.

The prince almost shrieked with laughing as every one now threw a glass of wine into his next neighbour’ face ; and it was done so rapidly, that Duval felt himself drenched by a glassful thrown at him by the person on his right-hand before he could rise to save himself from the infliction.

“ Oh ! Oh ! you will kill me among you !” said the prince. “ Oh, but this is good—I shall crack my sides ! Oh, dear—Oh, dear, I never laughed so much.”

Duval poured himself a full glass ; and as he dashed it in the great round fat face of the prince, he said—

“ Yes, it is a royal joke, and now it has passed round and gone home to roost at last.”

It would be impossible to describe the effect produced by this bold act upon the part of Duval. The prince sat, looking the picture of discomfiture, and several of the guests rose. Others were so tickled at the comic appearance of the prince’s face, with the red wine trickling down it, that if their lives had depended upon their gravity, they must have roared outright with laughter.

Duval thought it was time to go, and he rose ; but he would not hurry away for fear it should be thought that he was flying from dread of the consequences of the act he had done, and so boldly, too. He threw another glass of wine at another candle, and that left only five alight, so that the place was in a very dubious twilight, indeed.

"By the Lord, we shall be in the dark," said Austincourt, "if this sort of fun goes on!"

Duval left the room as Austincourt spoke, and he met Stephens in the anteroom.

"My horse," he said.

"It is at the gate, sir, as you ordered it to be."

"That will do; I shall be back in two hours if the prince should ask for me. He won't keep a very exact account of how the time goes now, I rather think?"

"Not very, sir."

Duval at once walked out into the garden. The sudden transition from the light of that room to the daylight on the out side was quite painful to the eyes, and made Duval wink again for a few moments. But that was but a very evanescent effect, and was gone almost as soon as it was noticed to appear.

Duval had taken the most special care as he made his way to the palace along with the colonel and Lord Austincourt, to note the route through the grounds; so that upon the spur of any moment, he might be able to make his way to the gate at which he had come in. That route led round some shrubberies, that in places were very thick and shady.

Duval heard a footstep.

"Some new guest," he said, "I presume. Ah who have we here?"

A well-dressed youth made his appearance coming on towards the palace.—Upon the sight of Duval he paused; but in a moment seemed to recover his courage, and he advanced and said—

"Is the prince in the room?"

The moment this youth spoke, Duval was convinced of what at first sight of him he had suspected—namely, that it was a young girl in male attire.

"Yes, my dear," replied Duval, "he is in the room."

"Ah, you know me?"

"Of course I do. You are one of the prettiest creatures it has been my lot to look on for many a long day."

"Ah, then," laughed the girl, "you don't know me. I was afraid you recognised me, but but your last words convince me that, although you have found that I have no right exactly to wear this apparel, you don't know who I am."

"You are right; I can add something to that, which is, that I care not who you are, while I can see what you are."

A slight flush came over the beautiful face, for indeed it was beautiful, and in all the first freshness of girlish charms, and she said—

"How, sir—would you insult me? What mean you?"

"Simply that you are the fairest of the fair."

"Oh, that, indeed, and who are you, sir?"

"The Baron Hoge."

"Well, that's not information; but you will now, sir, do me a singular favour."

"Anything that is in my power."

"Very good. Get out of my way, and you go your path, while I go mine."

"How can you be so cruel?" said Claude, as he caught her suddenly in his arms, and before she had power to resist, kissed her lips half a dozen times.

"Good-day," he then, said "we shall meet again I feel assured. How long will you remain here, beautiful being?"

"You are most insolent, sir, and I am truly surprised at you. How dare you kiss me in this way? I dare you, sir, let you be whom you may, to call at No. 10 Clarges Street, and ask for Marianna de Courcy."

"Thank you; of course I shall not think of calling, and so once more, adieu!"

The rather questionable young lady smiled and passed on, while Duval made his way towards the garden gate of the royal domain.

As he proceeded on he reasoned with himself.

"This carouse in the old palace will last the remainder of the day and all the night likewise, or I am very much mistaken. I should like to come back to it when the shadows of the evening are on the wane into night. Ah, and I will, too!"

He reached the gate, and there sure enough, his horse was waiting for him. He mounted, and then beckoning to the man at the gate, he said to him:—

"Look at me well, my friend, so that you may know me when I return, for I can't find De Lohm to get my ticket back from him again, and the prince will be furious if I don't come back soon."

"Oh, sir, we shall know you; it will be all right be assured of that, sir."

The object of Duval was to ride home to Hornsey for the purpose of calming any fears that May might have at his long protracted absence, which neither he nor she had expected.

Knowing, however, as she had known, that he had gone upon an expedition that might possibly be attended with some risk, he felt particularly anxious to assure her of his safety as well as to prepare her for a more continued absence in case he should persevere in his intention of returning to the fête of the Prince of Wales at Kew.

That he did intend to return was pretty evident. The royal carouse at the old palace in Kew gardens had too many temptations for one like Duval to resist it. He felt that while even he could not help despising the royal entertainer, that there was yet much in the entertainment to enchain the imagination, and to take the fancy prisoner.

It was still daylight when Duval reached Hornsey; but Luke was on the watch for him, and at once opened the garden gate for him to ride in, so that he should not be exposed to the curious gaze of their neighbors. It was a rare a chance for Duval to reach his home at such an hour as that, that there was more positive danger of observation in the few moments that it took him to pass from the road into it than half a dozen of his usual exits or entrances from his pretty rural abode.

"All right, Luke?"

"Yes sir, everything is as quiet as possible, sir."

As he spoke, Luke glanced about him rather nervously.

"Why, what's the matter with you, man?"

"I don't know, sir, but the fact is, I have been a little nervous all day; and I can't get that man out of my head that lies over there, sir, in the shade of the old trees."

Luke indicated the grave of the officer in the corner of the grounds, and Duval could not but see that his imagination was quite real, and that he was in a state of fear that he found it difficult to repress.

"Why, Luke," he said, in an encouraging tone, "I should hardly have expected this of you, do you know."

"No, sir, nor I; and if you were always at home I daresay the case would be very different; but as you are not, you see sir, it alters it very much; and I get brooding on things that it would be quite as well not to think of if one could possibly help."

"Oh, well, Luke, you must not mind all that; you will shake it off in a little time, man; and if you feel dull in the old house, why you might come out for a ride with me now and then."

"Ah, sir, I should like that very much."

"You shall, then; I am going out to-night, but it is not on the road, Luke, or you should not go with me; it is on a special invitation to supper, where

cannot introduce any one, I fear; but I will think of it within the next hour or so. How is your mistress, Luke?"

"She is quite well, sir, I believe."

At this instant May made her appearance to answer for herself; and the radiant look of joy that spread itself over her face at the appearance of Duval, was a sufficient answer in the affirmative as to her being quite well.

"How good of you," she said, as she accompanied him into the house, with her arm linked in his. "How good of you to come home so soon this evening. I feared you had been attracted by the spell of some wild adventure, and had gone off to carry it out, and that I might not see you for many a long hour."

"I have, May, been attracted by the spell of an adventure, and it is but to tell you that I may not return for the whole of the night, that I have ridden some miles even now."

"And you are going again?"

"I must."

"Ah, Duval, you do not love your home."

"In good truth, if I do not love the home, I love the fair and gentle spirit that gives to all its beauty, May; so we will just take a little refreshment, and then I must be off; and as I eat, I will tell you where I am going."

We will now leave our hero to recount to his loving May the fun and adventures he had enjoyed at the Prince's midday fête, and to paint to her the anticipations he had of the frolics which would consume the night, and which would certainly surpass what he had yet seen, for the evening banquet would be graced by the presence of beauty at least; if not of virtue. But of the lack of this latter ingredient Olando made no particular mention to May, as he knew she would then more urgently oppose his departure. With many kisses and promises Claude in company with Luke departed for the enjoyment of a mid-night carousal in the company of Royalty and Beauty. His extraordinary conduct while there, and what adventures he met with will be speedily published in the volume entitled, "DUVAL IN NEWGATE, OR THE TRAITOR JEW."

THE END

~~It is with much pleasure the Publisher announces to the reading Public, that, encouraged by the immense popularity of the CLAUDE DUVAL SERIES, he has been induced to secure at a very considerable expense, a most exciting work from the pen of the same author, illustrating the remarkable career of PAUL CLIFFORD, in which is embraced the history of JONATHAN WILD, BLUESKIN, and other celebrated highwaymen.~~

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